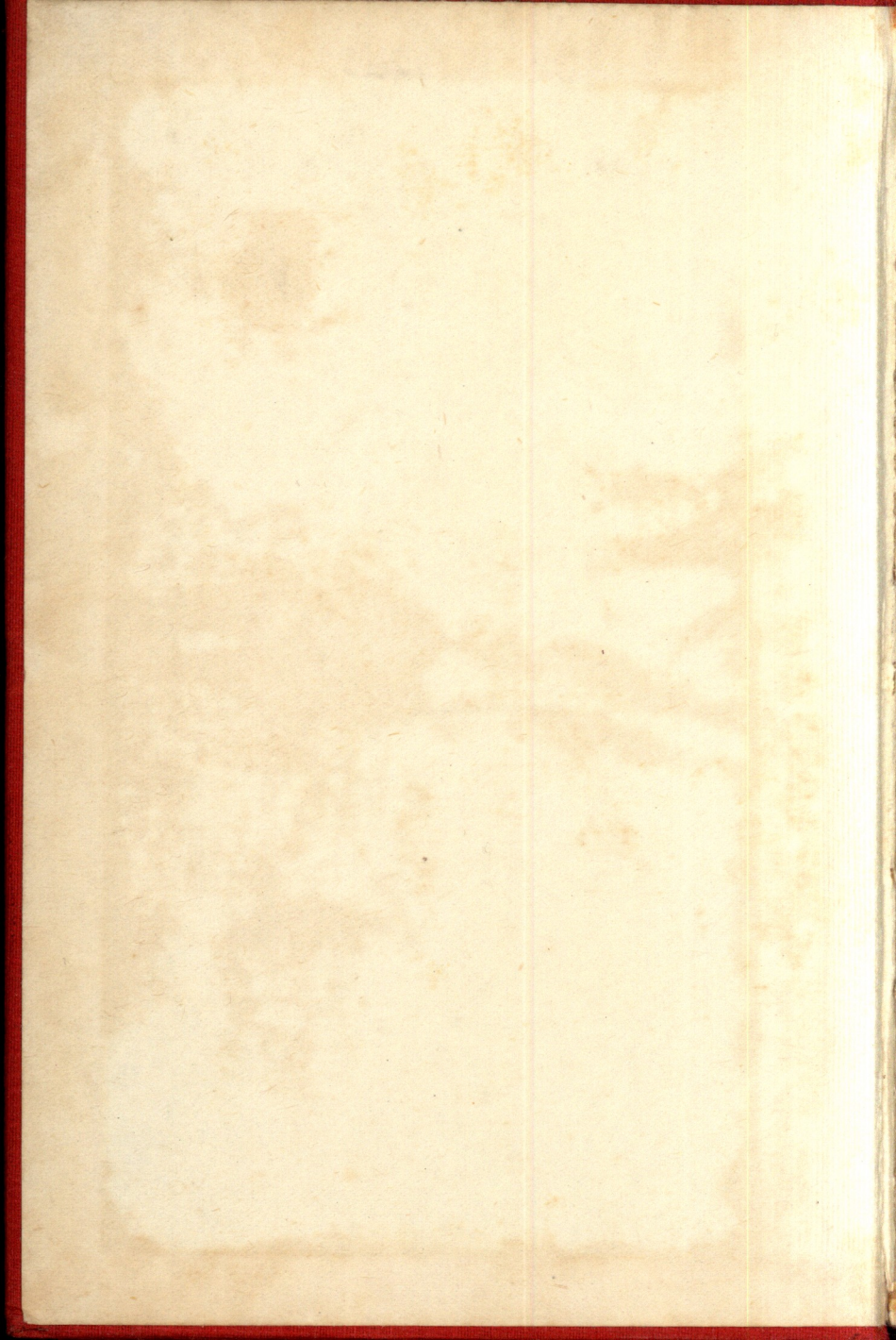


THE MAN WITH
YELLOW EYES

BY

BERTRAM ATKEY



THE MAN WITH YELLOW
EYES

**OTHER SMILER BUNN
BOOKS**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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GEORGE NEWNES, LTD.

THE AMAZING MR. BUNN
SMILER BUNN, GENTLE-
MAN CROOK

SMILER BUNN, MAN-
HUNTER



MYSTIFIED, MR. BUNN STARED IN, LISTENING INTENTLY.

[Page 67

THE MAN WITH YELLOW EYES

BY

BERTRAM ATKEY

AUTHOR OF "WINNIE O'WYNN AND THE WOLVES," "HARVEST
OF JAVELINS," "FOLK OF THE WILD"



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THE MAN WITH YELLOW EYES

CHAPTER I

MR. "SMILER" BUNN finished his second glass of costly pre-war liqueur brandy, sighed loudly for no apparent reason—unless it was because he and his friend and partner, ex-Lord Fortworth, were at the useless end of a careful and painstaking lunch—and lit a cigar that was worth far more than its weight in real money.

"No, Squire," he said, good-humouredly, with the air of one who maintains firmly a previously expressed opinion, "I am a man who has been gifted from birth with a remarkable talent for getting at the essence of things. The core of the apple, so to put it. I am, as a rule, gnawing at the core of a thing before an ordinary man like yourself has begun to find his way through the crust. You may have noticed that about me. Probably you have. It's not a thing I brag about, because it's as natural to me as—as, well, say the size of your feet are to you."

He started on his third liqueur and continued.

"But what really makes us melancholy, Squire, is the fact that there is more going out than is coming in. We're spending money by the half-bushel—we're earning it by the half-pint. If that. We want to think of some way of getting back to the old busy life when hardly a month passed by without a chance of some little rake-in and a trifle of healthy excitement. We've had very little of either lately, and we want to pull ourselves together and get busy."

"How?" demanded that somewhat dour-looking individual, ex-Lord Fortworth (more generally known to his friends as Mr. Henry Black).

Mr. Bunn smoked in silence for a moment. Few people, glancing at his heavy, red, good-humoured, closely-shaven face, would have credited that he was one of the deftest and most successful *chevaliers d'industrie* in London.

He removed his cigar at last and answered slowly.

"How, Squire? How shall we get busy? I can't tell you—in spite of my great natural gifts. But I've just had a hunch, a fancy, come floating into my head, and perch on the edge of my brain, that we are not so far off a bit of big business. How, when or why, I don't know. It's instinctive—a bit of my natural genius sticking out."

"Like the tail of a tramp's shirt," said Lord Fortworth, sourly.

"Well, that ain't altogether the most elegant way of putting it," observed Mr. Bunn, stiffly. "But—in a low sort of way—you're about right. . . . And between ourselves, I shan't be sorry. We've been running to seed and you are putting on flesh at a rate

that would get *me* scared. You know your own business best, n'doubt—but it would be a good thing for us both if something cropped up to keep us active on our legs and busy in our minds for a time. However, we shall see."

He helped himself to another cigar.

"I can smell money and excitement as far off as a nigger can smell water-melon," he declared, speciously, "and I've got an idea that there's a flavour of both in the air!"

But Fortworth only laughed with a touch of morose scorn.

"That's simply because Harchester Hall, down at Purdston, has been bought by old Whitney Vandermonde for his heiress to enjoy a year or two of life in England. Anybody with any human feeling would catch a flavour of money in the air if the niece of one of the richest men in the world chanced to settle down more or less next door—as she has with us. If I am any judge of things, our little place at Purdston will reek of money before long. The lady took possession last week, didn't she? That's why you've caught a flavour of money in the air. My advice to you—the advice of a plain man, without any frills, and without any damned fancy natural gifts—is to——"

But here he broke off suddenly as his partner turned away and rose to greet a lady who, apparently leaving the dining-room, had caught sight of them and deflected herself in their direction.

She was an extremely good-looking woman with red-hot hair, an impossibly perfect complexion, notable eyes, and an excessively self-possessed manner. She

was alone, but gave off without the slightest difficulty a marked impression that she was entirely capable of taking the greatest possible care of herself—if she wished to.

“Of all the friends I have in town, you are the two I most wished to see,” she said in a deep, cooing, pigeony contralto. “I am going to sit down and break some very good news to you over a cigarette and a liqueur. I am your fairy godmother to-day. I was just going to call at your flat.”

Mr. Bunn’s smile decreased slightly. He knew Mrs. Fay-Lacy quite well enough to be very definitely aware that she had never yet fairy-godmothered anybody in her life but herself, and, as he put it later to his partner, she probably charged herself a ruinous fee every time she had done even that.

But he was usually ready to listen to the prattle of a lady after a good lunch, and he made her welcome.

“That’s what we like about you, Esme, my dear,” he said easily. “Ever on the look-out to do somebody a good turn. Don’t you ever think of yourself at all—ha-ha!”

She flashed a glance at him.

“Not half as much as I ought to—in a city like this,” she claimed, and lit her cigarette.

“How is business?” inquired Mr. Bunn—for the vivacious flame-crowned lady, in spite of her godmotherly weakness, was by no means one of the drones. She had long ago struck out for herself, and, Mr. Bunn believed, had continued for some years past—ever since parting for ever with her husband

as the result of a decision given in the middle department of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division—to maintain herself in extremely comfortable circumstances as an agent—representing Mr. Craik Lazenger, the celebrated money-lender. There were not lacking sardonic folk who referred to the striking Mrs. Fay-Lacy as the Money-Spider, but it was the pleasing custom of Mr. Bunn and his partner to “take people as they found them,” and since she had never fallen into the foolish error of mistaking the partners for flies, they were the best of friends.

“Business? Oh, you mean the financial agency,” crooned the lady. “I’ve given that up—practically. Everybody wants to borrow money, but nobody has anything but the quaintest kind of security to offer. . . . I can always arrange a small matter for anyone on reasonable security, of course. But it’s about another thing I wanted to see you.”

She thought for a moment.

“Did I dream it or haven’t you told me at some time or other that you’ve a funny, ramshackle, tumble-down, old country house on your hands somewhere down near Purdston?” she asked.

It was the partners’ turn to think. For it was at Purdston, a very quiet, scattered village, on the Surrey-Hants border, that they had long maintained a very cosy and secluded little country house, to which they often fled for recuperation after their life in London, or change from their town flat. Very few people knew of this, for they were not men who took any very keen delight in talking at random about their private affairs.

But evidently the fire-crested fair one before them knew of it.

Mr. Bunn nodded slowly, with the air of a man who suddenly remembers something.

"Why, yes, we have—a bit of a bandbox of a place. Why, my dear?"

"I happen to know of someone who would be willing to take it off your hands, if it's a nuisance to you at all," cooed Esme. "They want to live down there, and there are very few houses to be had in that neighbourhood. They would pay a little over the market value if you insisted, I fancy."

Mr. Bunn nodded.

"Well, that's interesting," he said, affably.

"What is the place worth?" asked Mrs. Fay-Lacy, with a touch of indifference.

"Oh, that depends. Hey, Squire? Depends on a lot of things. But, in the open market, I suppose it ought to be worth—what? Say five thousand pounds."

"Will you sell it for that? I think my friends might give you that for it."

Mr Bunn seemed suddenly to have become dull—very dull.

"Wait a minute," he said, heavily. "I am not sure we want to sell it, hey, Squire? . . . Might think it over. . . . Can't see why anybody wants to live there, anyway. Suits us two old fogeys for a week-end, now and then, but it's a dull place, Purdston. Nothing doing there at all. This new neighbour of ours, Miss—Miss—Whatsname—might liven things up a little. She's just bought a big place close by—Harchester Hall, Lord Dules's estate—and I understand she's a

niece and heiress of old Whitney D. Vandermonde—America's next-best to John D. Rockefeller. Your friend anything to do with this lady, my dear? "

Behind a thin haze of smoke Mr. Bunn's eyes were watching her intently.

"Nothing so plutocratic!" said the fair Esme, with a tiny yawn, dropping her cigarette end into an ash-tray. "They're just quiet folk come home from abroad who want to settle down."

Mr Bunn's lip twitched. He had caught the slight dilation of the wonderful eyes of the lady as he spoke.

"Oh, are they? I see. Well, we'll think it over—hey, Squire?—and let you know. Might be able to do business. I don't know that the place is much use to us, and we should like to oblige a friend of yours. We'll think it over and get in touch with you."

"Thanks."

Mrs. Fay-Lacy rose.

"I am meeting them in half an-hour. They'll be so pleased," she gushed.

"That's good. But they may not get it," Mr. Bunn warned her. "Tell 'em that—before they're too pleased."

It was the neighbourly thing to warn her—for neither of the partners had the remotest intention of selling Purdston Old Place, as their little "cyclone cellar" (to quote Fortworth) was called.

And if an ordinary, everyday person had inquired about it he, or she, would certainly have received an ordinary, every-day "no" for answer.

But as Mr. Bunn shortly afterwards expressed it—"when a fancy-witted finch like Esme Fay-Lacy pulls

that fairy-godmother stuff on you to the tune of five thousand, you want to hunt for reasons before you accept any offer or you might find yourself nicely in a fairy cart ! ”

He was not far wrong.

And to leave the matter wide open presumably was one of his ways of hunting for reasons.

CHAPTER II

SHORTLY after dinner that evening, the partners, each comfortably buried alive in a colossal easy chair, engaged in philosophic reflection upon things in general, were disturbed abruptly by the ringing of the telephone bell.

Mr. Bunn, nearest to the noise, lifted the receiver.

He spoke for a few moments, then hung up thoughtfully.

"And who might that noisy, bell-ringing night-hawk have been?" demanded Fortworth, a little sourly.

Mr. Bunn chuckled.

"Our fairy godmother again. She rang up to say her friend is on the way to have a little chat with us about buying Purdston Old Place."

"Ah, is he so? Well, he's wasting his time."

"Sure, sure," replied Mr. Bunn. "But he mayn't be wasting ours."

He selected a cigar and took up a tropical position on the hearth-rug.

"You know me, Squire, and you know my gifts," he continued blandly. "I won't dwell on my gift for clairaudience——"

Fortworth sat up suddenly. His partner's proneness to self-complacence invariably acted as a red rag to him.

"Clair-which?" he demanded.

"Clear hearing, that means. My gift for hearing things that the average ivory-head never hears—such as the rustle of a flock of bank notes flying towards us a long way off! I hear it now. You don't, because you haven't got any remarkable gift. But that's not your fault—it's your misfortune. I'm clairaudient—clear hearing. You're thick-hearing. That's all. No mystery about it. It's the way we are."

Fortworth jerked impatiently.

"Then again there's my gift for noticing details—little minute things that ain't visible to an ordinary man, like yourself——"

"What have you noticed about this Purdston Old Place business that I've missed, anyway?" snapped Fortworth.

"I'll tell you——" began Mr. Bunn. But he did not, for at that moment Sing Song stole in to announce a caller. He tendered a card to his proprietor.

"Major Aldebaran Weir, Army of the Republic of South China," read Mr. Bunn quietly. "With no address and no club. No place to go to, evidently—so he comes here, to buy us out of house and home."

He glanced at his partner, who shrugged acquiescence.

"Major Aldebaran Weir, hey?" said Mr. Bunn, musingly. "Of the South Chinese Army, as you may say!" He went across to the window, moved the blind a little and peered out.

"Major Aldebaran Weir—with a private Daimler limousine, and a pal in evening dress waiting for him—having a chat with the chauffeur, in fact. Humph! Well, well, show the Major in, Sing, show him in."

He turned to Fortworth.

"I can hear 'em rustling like a flock of starlings," he said, cryptically.

But if he referred, as Fortworth understood him to do, to bank notes, it was soon made evident that they were not notes belonging to Major Aldebaran Weir.

One glance at the thin, yellowish face of their visitor satisfied Fortworth that whatever his personal weaknesses were, slovenly carelessness with his money was not one of them. Dressed perfectly, well groomed and barbered, though he was, nothing could conceal the staring fact that here was a hard man who had lived a hard life.

Lean almost to emaciation, he was something over six feet tall, and in spite of his fleshless appearance he gave off a curious impression of great physical strength. His face was extraordinarily wrinkled, covered with a network of lines, so fine that they would not be visible a yard away. His lips were thin and hard under the narrow line of a queer, drooping, stringy black moustache—so slender that it looked almost like a tapering cord hanging down on each side of his cruel mouth. His hair, too was sleek and straight and black.

But the most startling of the several little peculiarities which one noted instantly about Major Aldebaran Weir, of the South China Army, were his eyes. They slanted like those of a Mongol, and the upper lid was folded over in a straight-seeming line, so that he had the appearance of a man extraordinarily fatigued, worn-out. Yet it was not this strange, discomforting and, they were to learn before long, deceptive air of

deadly weariness which jarred on them most—it was the colour of the eyes that burned under the folded lids.

They were yellow—like darkly brilliant topaz—hot, glowing, luminous, fierce and *strange*. . . .

“ Good evening, gentlemen. I must ask your pardon for this late call, but the matter is urgent,” said Major Aldebaran Weir, in a very soft, but also very distinct voice.

Mr. Bunn nodded. Like Fortworth, he had been conscious of an acute thrill of uneasiness on his first glance at their caller, but it had passed. Smiler Bunn had never been a man who allowed another personality to overwhelm his own for more than a second or so—unless he wished it to appear so.

“ Urgent, hey? Well, Major, my experience with urgent matters is that the sooner they are settled the better. So sit down, and have a cigar and a whisky and soda, and we’ll take a look at the matter,” he invited, cordially.

“ Thank you. Our charming mutual friend, Mrs. Fay-Lacy, did not exaggerate when she warned me—playfully—against your hospitality.”

Their caller dropped into a chair, slewing it smoothly, so that he faced them both.

Mr. Bunn chuckled as he touched the bell.

“ If it is hospitable to offer what we regard as the necessities of life to a visitor, then we’ve certainly got the habit of hospitality. Just bring in some fresh glasses and some more soda, my son,” he added to Sing Song.

The Chink’s beady eyes flickered to the table on

which stood the recently filled glasses of the partners, and he vanished, soft-footed as a yellow ghost.

"I trust, gentlemen, that Mrs. Fay-Lacy was not too optimistic when she hinted that the purchase of Purdston Old Place was largely a question of price?" said Major Aldebaran Weir, in his soft, faintly sibilant voice.

Mr. Bunn pondered for a moment.

"If she hinted that, Major, she was not in a pessimistic mood, anyway. We left it open, true—but no more than half-an-inch open," he explained. "However, there's nothing like talking things over. You want a place in a hurry, and I suppose you've seen it—from the outside, anyway. How much is it worth to you? . . . Ah, here we are. This will help us talk it over."

Sing Song put down a small tray containing a glass and a siphon on a little table by the caller's arm, and faded into the background.

Mr. Bunn passed the decanter and Major Aldebaran Weir poured himself what must have been a South Chinese officer's ration—about three generous inches. He sprayed half-an-inch of bubbles into it and raised his glass.

"To a successful transaction, gentlemen," he said, with a thin smile, and drained the glass like a man who has drained many a glass before.

He put it on the table and leaned back, with a curious low sigh.

"Well, how much is the place worth to you?" said Smiler, easily. "We'll be frank and tell you at once that we don't really want or expect to sell it at all.

Still, business is always business and—there's no harm in pricing a place. So—to come to business—what do you say? "

But Major Aldebaran Weir said nothing—nothing at all.

He was sitting comfortably in his chair, his head resting against the softly upholstered back, staring straight at Mr. Bunn.

But his eerie yellow eyes were like dull glass, and his heavy jaw hung down.

For an instant Mr. Bunn stared in amazement, then sprang up.

"My God, the man's dead!" he said, harshly.

"What—what's that?" croaked Fortworth swinging heavily up from his chair. "Dead—dead, man—don't——"

But as they stooped over the lax, lolling form, Sing Song the Chink emerged like a soft, cat-like thing from the shadows in the far corner of the room by the door. He purred to them.

"Not dead, you savvy, master—altee same sleepee—me dluggee him. You seeing—me tellee you bime by—you watchee me, now. He altee same wide awake in ten minute."

He slipped past Mr. Bunn and slid questing, yellow hands into the pockets of Major Aldebaran Weir.

Fortworth, with an oath, put a hand to the shoulder of the Chinese valet to jerk him back from the unconscious man, but his partner stopped him.

"Easy, Squire, easy—he's not such a fool as he looks," warned Mr. Bunn, who had a shrewder idea of

Sing Song's wits than his partner. "Let's see what the lad's after."

They were not left long in doubt. Sing Song appeared only too anxious to show whatever he found.

He worked swiftly, deftly, with a strange excitement.

From each side pocket of the dinner jacket, under the thin, smartly cut overcoat, he produced an automatic pistol of medium calibre, showed them to Mr. Bunn, and slipped them back again. His neat, groping fingers played delicately about the narrow waistcoat pocket of the man in the chair—dipping in, to draw out a thin, flat lacquered case of about the size of a lady's visiting card. Handling it with extraordinary care, he pulled off one end which seemed to act as a cover, disclosing the ends of six little slips of dark ivory—rather like ordinary matches flattened out broadly at the end. He gave a curious, cat-like spitting sound as he glared at these, and laid the case gently on the table.

"You no touchee them, master. You touchee, you deadee."

His fingers curled, like things with eyes, to the inside lining of the waistcoat, writhed softly there, found the secret pocket for which they sought, and came out holding a thin roll of what proved to be tough, cream-coloured silky paper, on which were painted in vermillion ink, a series of Chinese characters—totally meaningless to Mr. Bunn.

The Chinaman stared at them for an instant, muttering. Then he carefully rolled the tiny strip, and replaced it.

The partners watched him, fascinated.

"Some workman, Sing," muttered Mr. Bunn, with a sort of dazed pride.

The Chinaman seized the long, fleshless hand of Major Aldebaran Weir, raised it and slid back the right cuff and sleeve, peering at the inner forearm, murmuring to himself.

Suddenly he stiffened——

"Look, master—you seeing, please!"

His finger tip rested lightly on the soft white skin at the inner bend of the elbow.

Craning over, the partners saw a curious blue mark, a design like a little blue tangle of veins.

But it was not the tracery of any veins. It was a tattoo mark—a snake—a cobra with inflated hood.

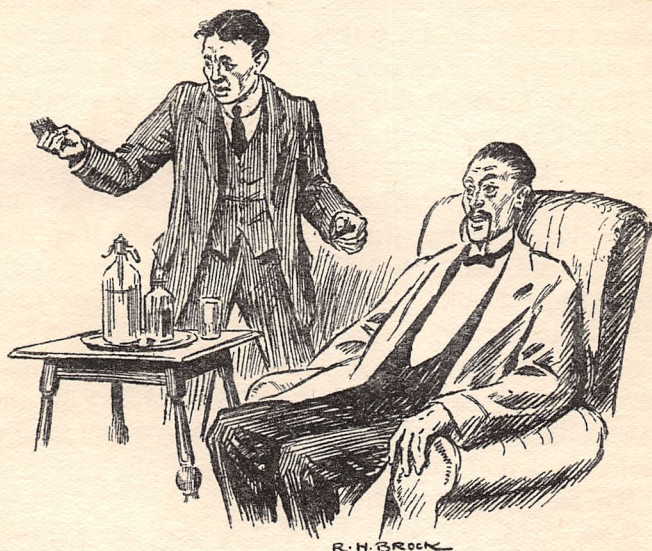
Sing Song pulled down the sleeve and turned, grinning with excitement, to his owner, drawing up his own sleeve.

"Allee same Cobra Tong, master," he said in a low, rapid voice and pointed to a similar tattoo mark inside his own right forearm. He turned back to the table.



"You no touchee, master—me tellee in one minute," he said, took up the little lacquer case and hurried out of the room. The partners stared at each other and at the unconscious man.

"He's some conjurer, that yellow scoundrel of mine,"



"YOU NO TOUCHEE, MASTER—YOU TOUCHEE, YOU DEADEE!"

said Mr. Bunn, with a species of affection in his voice. "Better do as he suggests. We'll get the reasons out of him later. Must be *some* reason for all this, hey?"

He scowled at Major Aldebaran Weir.

"This sportsman don't exactly go about unarmed," he observed. "Shouldn't be surprised if he's safer as he is."

Fortworth, always inclined to heavy anger when he encountered anything he did not understand—like a rhinoceros—agreed rather sulkily.

“You’d think he meant to shoot our agreement to sell the Old Place out of us, the way he comes with a battery concealed on him. We’ll have to ask him about that when he wakes. What sort of manners or etiquette is it to come into a peaceful flat with a tool in each pocket this way—Chinese?” he growled.

But then Sing Song glided in. He worked swiftly. He replaced the lacquer-case in the Major’s pocket, substituted another glass—half-filled with whisky and soda—for the drugged glass from which the man had drunk—and turning to Mr. Bunn and his partner, asked them to be seated as they were before the drug took effect. Hurriedly, in his clipped, queer English, he explained that if they went on with the conversation at precisely the point at which it had been broken off, the extremely well-armed victim of the drug would hardly realize that there had been any hiatus at all.

Mr. Bunn understood.

“All right, my son. . . . But I shall be wanting a talk with you afterwards. Who the devil gave you leave to keep valuable drugs like this without my knowledge, hey? . . . All right, get out, if you want to.”

They sat again, as the Chink disappeared, facing the Major.

His hand moved slightly—a faint stirring—and Mr. Bunn, who had long ago learned that he could trust his yellow valet—if nobody else could—in any serious matter, followed Sing Song’s advice implicitly

At the first movement, therefore, of the lean, claw-like hand, he began to speak.

“—the fact is, Major, that we have grown to like the place and nothing but a very exceptional offer would jolt us, so to put it, into parting—a point which, perhaps, we should have put more plainly to Mrs. Fay-Lacy when she first raised the thing in the Astoritz at lunch-time to-day and—” his voice went droning on and on as he watched the light of returning reason rekindle itself in the topaz eyes of the Mongol-visaged Major—“ did her utmost to persuade us to part with the place. But, as I say—and my partner agrees with me—it is a question whether the price you mention will chime with the price we might feel inclined to accept. So put a figure to it, Major, put a figure to it——”

The Major had recovered completely now. He said nothing for a moment—but they saw his fierce eyes flash round the room, play over them, dart to the half-empty glass by his side, and his hands steal to his pockets, feeling furtively. He reassured himself of his weapons, and the puzzled suspicion slowly cleared.

“I—pardon me, gentlemen—I have been inattentive. For a moment I could see nothing—a kind of blackness passed over my eyes. A damned funny feeling. It passed in an instant—like dropping off to sleep for half-a-second.”

Mr. Bunn nodded with bland sympathy and understanding.

“*I* know, Major. Liver—get it myself. Sick sort of absent feeling—you kind of lose the thread of what you’re saying—and get sort of—well, buffaloed.

Spots in front of your eyes—that kind of thing. As I say, liver. It cost me a handful of money to find that out. I went straight to an oculist and a specialist when I first had that happen to me. Your liver went back on you—short circuited, hey? Try a glass of old brandy for it. Nothing like a drop of brandy for keeping your works up to the mark. No? Well, as you wish . . . You're feeling all right now? Right. Good. Now what about the house? ”

He leaned back good-humouredly upon their visitor.

“ I will give you five thousand pounds for the house,” said Major Aldebaran Weir.

Mr. Bunn smiled.

“ There is nothing whatsoever doing at the figure,” he said. “ I'm sorry, Major—but only a fancy price can tempt us.”

The Major studied him in silence for a moment. It was completely evident that Mr. Bunn spoke the barest truth and the Major wasted no time.

“ I see. You don't really want to sell at all. So I will tell you my outside figure at once. I will give you fifteen thousand pounds for the house,” he said, coldly, passionlessly, with nothing whatever in his look or tone to indicate that there was anything extraordinary in this huge jump of ten thousand pounds above the market value of the house.

“ It is a pleasure to do business with a man like you, Major,” said Mr. Bunn, warmly. “ I hate a haggler. The offer is not excepted.”

The fleshless yellow face darkened.

“ Eh? Refused! My dear sir! I am offering you ten thousand pounds more than its value! ”

"Yes—that's why we're refusing it, Major," said Mr. Bunn, very cheerfully indeed. "If it's worth fifteen thousand to you we kind of feel it's worth more than that to us—as soon as we can find out why it's worth that money to you."

Major Aldebaran Weir said nothing for a moment. His eyes burned yellow, but he kept perfect control of himself as he rose.

"You have wasted my time," he said, with a curious, cold hostility in his tone.

"No, no, Major—you've wasted your own time," corrected Mr. Bunn, easily.

Major Aldebaran Weir nodded after a moment.

"I agree. I was misled by the confidence of Mrs. Fay-Lacy," he said softly. He put on his hat and his gloves. One hand he slipped into a pocket of his dinner jacket.

"I advise—I strongly advise—that you sell the house to me," he said, with a faint, far-off menace in his voice. "It will save me a great deal of trouble."

"You're angry, Major. What trouble will it save you?" smiled Mr. Bunn.

A sudden dreadful malignance shot into the strange eyes of the man; and his wide, thin lips parted in an ugly smile.

"The trouble of having to negotiate for its purchase from your executors!" he said, slowly.

Mr. Bunn sensed, rather than saw, the outline of the muzzle of the automatic pistol pressing against the cloth of the Major's pocket.

"Executors, hey?" he said. "Well, well, if you feel that you want to take all that trouble, take it!

Certainly. So do, Major Aldebaran Weir of the South Chinese Army, so do ! But you may take it from me that it ain't a really original idea. You are not the first enterprising young fellow who has tried to fix things so that our executors come into action—over our dead bodies, so to put it. But we're still here, you notice. My advice to you is to study how to keep out of trouble with us—not to charge headfirst into it."

He moved tranquilly to the door, and opened it.

" You've got a lot to learn about house-hunting," he continued. " Your tactics are too Chinese to please me—and you'll find that unless you can learn to negotiate for a house in this country without dragging in a lot of executors, you are going to remain homeless for a considerable time. It ain't the popular thing to threaten to remove the owner of a house unless he sells it to you, nowadays. At least, not in England. It's out-of-date and old-fashioned. Used to be done, I believe—but it went out of fashion some time during the reign of Stephen and Matilda—whoever Matilda may have been. So, good-night to *you*, Major Aldebaran Weir—of the South Chinese Army ! "

He shouted for Sing Song, who appeared silently, apparently from nowhere, to show the caller out.

The Major hesitated, glaring.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and passed out.

" You shall not be forgotten ! " he said, malevolently, as he went.

CHAPTER III

PROMPTLY the partners put Sing Song through an examination concerning his most un-valetlike behaviour in connection with the deadly-looking Weir.

He explained satisfactorily.

Major Aldebaran Weir, it appeared, on seeing that Sing Song was a Chinaman, had made a certain sign. Sing Song had recognised the sign, but he had not answered it, for it had been one of the signals of membership of a certain Chinese Tong, or secret society. Sing Song, many years before, had been a member of this tong—the forbidding name of which, he explained, was, in full, The Honourable Society of The Cobra—but, in his simple Chinese way, little Sing Song had long since learned the inadvisability of allowing any casual stranger to know that he belonged, or had once belonged, to any tong whatsoever. There were obligations attached to membership, and highly discomforting penalties were liable to follow disregard of those obligations—in certain circumstances. That became clearer to the partners later on—though they accepted the Chinaman's word for it from the start.

Aware that this visitor was a member—and probably an important one—of this, one of the most powerful of the many criminal societies in China, Sing had not hesitated to use his drug for the purpose of aiding him to get a somewhat clearer notion of Major

Aldebaran Weir's character in general. The pistols explained themselves, but the strip of painted paper explained much more; even though, stated Sing Song, it contained only a few words and three signatures, of which Weir's was probably one. These names meant that three members of the tong were entrusted with a special enterprise, and, presumably as a guard against treachery, each of the three possessed a copy of the written undertaking signed by the others—a device much in favour among the desperadoes of all tongs.

The words over the signatures Sing Song had not been able to read—they were in some dialect or tongue unfamiliar to Sing, who was far from being an educated Chinaman. But he had made out among the characters two names in English :

“ Patricia Charmian Vandermonde ” and “ Whitney David Vandermonde . ”

The Chinese signatures had been those of three men, Li Shan, Fan Tzu Kang, and Tsin Tan. One of these names, Sing believed, was the Chinese name of the Major.

The roll of paper had been the only interesting find—that and the discovery of the hall-mark of the tong—the tattooed cobra on the inner arm.

As for the lacquer case, that merely corroborated the evidence of the man's character suggested by the automatics. Sing Song proved this very simply. He produced a lacquered case almost identical with that carried by Major Aldebaran Weir, placed it on a table, warning the partners not to touch it, and disappeared for a moment.

He was back almost at once, bringing a rat in a wire cage.

"You watchee, please master," he advised, and proceeded to manœuvre the rat—a big, lively, vicious beast—into a corner of the cage. Then, very carefully, he took one of the match-like ivory splinters from the case, and pressed the needle-sharp point against the rat with just enough force to give the merest pin-prick. The rat squeaked once, then suddenly relaxed limply, shivered, and lay still.

It was dead. A heavy rifle bullet could not have killed it quicker.

"Poisoned thorns!" said Mr. Bunn, quietly, his ruddy face paling a trifle, his eyes hard and greenish like jade.

Sing Song smiled, carefully replaced the splinter in its case, and explained that when Major Aldebaran Weir felt called upon to use the ivory "thorns" in his case, he would get a disappointment—for he, Sing Song, had substituted for the poison splinters in the Major's case, half-a-dozen precisely similar but harmless one from a case of his own.

A day was to come when Mr. Bunn would appreciate that quick change to the full; and perhaps he had some dim inkling of that, for he actually did then what he had spoken vaguely of doing for years. He raised Sing Song's "money" then and there.

"Right, Sing. You can put those poison pins out of action right away—in case of accidents. Understand me, son? At once. And from now on you stand to draw from me five shillings a week rise! D'ye get that, my lad? You're raised. Your money's

gone up. Hey? How's *that*, son? I've talked about it for years—now I've done it. A crown a week! That's the result of sticking to your *job*, Sing. Raised money. Understand, now, you don't need to play the fool, or get swelled head because your money's gone up—or I'll cut it down again, quick. But you've been a good lad. Keep so. You look after us, and I'll take care of you. Remove the rat—and come back here!"

From the discussion which followed emerged the definite decision that the interests of the partners clearly and unmistakably called for their presence without loss of time at Purdston Old Place.

"It's simple arithmetic," Mr. Bunn had declared to his partner. "Look at the facts—here, I'll run through 'em, to save time: First, Patricia Vandermonde, sole heiress to the second richest man in the world, decides to spend a year or two in England and buys Harchester Hall.

"Second, Major Aldebaran Weir, as cold and complete a crook as I ever had the privilege of seeing searched, offers us a fancy price for Purdston Old Place, the nearest house to Harchester Hall there is.

"Third, Weir is proved to be a member of this Cobra Tong, a powerful criminal society.

"Fourth, we've found out that he and two more like him, have started out on some enterprise to do with Whitney D. Vandermonde and his heiress, and as those people can't be in need of anything the Cobra crew can give 'em, we'll put it the other way round and say that the Cobra gang are in need of something the Vandermondes can provide—if they want to.

"Fifth, Weir is fool enough to threaten us because we won't sell.

"Sixth, and last—and most important—there's my hunch, my presentiment, that a great flock of notes—enough to darken the sky—have taken wing in our direction. . . . How about it, Squire? It seems to me that we're wasting our time hanging about in London. Purdston is where we ought to be. Hey?"

Fortworth, who had been grumbling intermittently ever since Major Aldebaran Weir had left, agreed dourly.

"Good!"

Mr. Bunn glanced at the clock.

"Ten-thirty! There's no time like the present. What's to stop us running down there right away? Money's like a bird. If you're going to drop a pinch of salt on its rudder, you want to be lively about it."

Fortworth had no objection to advance, for, when roused and "started," he was about as easy to stop as an irritated grizzly bear. So Mr. Bunn got what he described as "busy."

"Good! You telephone to Bloom to expect us, Squire!" Bloom was the butler who, with his wife, comprised the "staff" at Purdston.

"You, Sing, clear up here as quick as you can, and then get the car round."

"Yes, master."

Sing hovered, uncertainly, his beady eyes glittering.

"Well, what is it, son? Hurry up and out with it."

"Please, master, you takee gun this time, yes?"

Velly bad, allee same quick killee evely time—Cobra Tong men bad—velly cunning, velly quick ! ”

Chevaliers d'industrie, knights of fortune, adventurers though they were, it was very rarely indeed that Smiler Bunn and Fortworth ever carried firearms, and never before had the competent Sing ventured to advise it.

But evidently he was taking this business in very grim earnest, and as the partners were no longer sufficiently young and foolish to ignore good advice because it came from a humble source, they agreed readily to go armed.

“ Well, you ought to know about the Cobra Tong—as a member yourself,” said Mr. Bunn drily. “ We’ll take our tools along. Now, see about it ! ”

Within half-an-hour their big Rolls-Royce limousine was sliding across Westminster Bridge on its way to Purdston.

For a time the partners smoked in silence.

The queer-looking scoundrel who called himself Weir and claimed to be a Major in that nebulous and far-off horde which he described as the Army of South China, had chilled them both a little, either by his appearance, his threat, or, more probably, by the atmosphere of sheer, cold-blooded malignity which, towards the end of his visit, he had radiated. Both Mr. Bunn and his slightly morose partner were vaguely conscious of a premonition that they had been, or were about to be, caught up in an affair, compared with which most of the adventures from which they had profited in the past, were but small and dangerless.

Two facts stood out starkly for their consideration

—the one being that the Tong against which they were preparing to campaign was wealthy, powerful, and formidably unscrupulous, and the other being the practical certainty that any affair involving Whitney Vandermonde and his heiress had to do with very great stakes.

“Any guessing we do now will be just that much good guessing wasted,” said Mr. Bunn, as they ran clear of the suburbs and the pace of the big, powerful car increased. “But if you can tell me what is the connection between you and me at Purdston, Patricia Vandermonde at Harchester Hall, Whitney Vandermonde in New York, Mrs. Fay-Lacy in London, Major Aldebaran Weir of the South Chinese Army, and these Cobra Tong devils from nowhere, you’d tell me something I can’t guess for myself.”

“I am no guess-expert,” said Fortworth, dourly. “But there’s one thing I can point out which is no guess. You can take it that if Weir carried these poison thorns as part of his stock-in-trade, his two Chinese pals carry ’em too—and theirs haven’t been unloaded by Sing Song. You want to keep that glued in your mind!”

He stared sulkily out of the window.

“And I’ll go so far as to say that I’m not fancying the business of clashing with these highbinders, at all. We’re butting in between a multi-millionaire, of whom we know nothing, and a crew that would be better left alone. I hope your hunch is a real hunch, and one that’s going to bring in a whole lot of grist to the mill, for I’ve got more than a mere hunch that we’re going to earn it. Personally speaking, I’ll go

so far as to say that I wouldn't have agreed to touch the thing if that other thing out of the Chinese Army hadn't *threatened* us."

His voice thickened, and Mr. Bunn concealed a smile.

"I allow no man, whether of the Chinese Army or the Salvation Army or any other Army, to threaten me in my own flat," went on the ex-peer, who seemed to have been steadily accumulating a grim, slightly ferocious determination to teach Major Aldebaran Weir a lesson that he would not readily forget.

That was Fortworth's way, and nobody knew better than the astute old adventurer his partner.

"I think we are damned fools to interfere, and I don't value your hunch a cent, to be frank about it; but I've been turning things over in my mind, and I guess I'll have to have another word with that Aldebaran tough," growled Fortworth.

"Sure, Squire," agreed Mr. Bunn; "and you're right. Besides, they tell me that this little lady, Patricia, is a very friendly, attractive little dame."

His voice changed :

"Better keep your gatling handy," he warned. "I shouldn't be surprised if these Cobra guys start the rough stuff—if any—without much delay. What's Sing doing?"

Sing Song had switched off all his lights, and the pace of the car slackened as it swung round a sharp right-hand turning.

They were approaching their house, and from the road on which they were travelling now a lighted car would be easily visible from the house.

But rather unexpectedly Sing Song stopped the car, and came round to them.

"Well, you yellow wolf, what is it?"

Sing explained that he had seen a light—near the house. Nothing more than the tiny beam of a small electric torch, which had flashed out, wavered and vanished.

He had stopped the car, he said urgently in the darkness, because he thought perhaps his master would prefer to approach the house quietly and on foot. Mr. Bunn peered out towards the house.

"No lights indoors, either," he muttered. "That's not usual; you telephoned Bloom that we should be coming, didn't you, Sing? And he answered, hey? . . . Well, what the devil has he got the place in darkness for? Ought to be busy laying the table in the dining-room at least. I don't like it, Sing, you yellow scoundrel. . . . He's right, Squire. We'll leave the car here and walk up to the house. Probably it's all right, but may as well be careful!"

They moved quietly through the darkness towards the gate of the curving, tree-bordered drive leading to the front of the house.

It was very dark.

At the drive-entrance they paused, listening. From the edge of the village, some considerable distance away, hidden by a rise, they heard a dog howling faintly, but save for that, there was no sound. Away across a wide park, the boundary of which was also the boundary of the Old Place grounds, many lights still burned warmly in the windows of Harchester Hall. But the house of the partners was dark.

"Seems all right—queer about the lights, though," muttered Mr. Bunn. "All right—go quietly." He led them down the drive, a big electric torch in one hand, and automatic in the other. They moved silently on the short turf at the side of the roadway.

They had gone a third of the way along the drive, and Mr. Bunn was beginning to smile at their caution, when a wild thudding of hoofs on the hard gravel at the front of the house drummed suddenly through the darkness. There was a shout, a thin scream, and the dance of the hoofs settled into the steady pounding of a gallop.

"Stand back!" warned Mr. Bunn.

The flying hoofs drummed near, and drew level. The sudden beam of Mr. Bunn's torch threw up a picture of a horse galloping furiously through the darkness towards the drive gates.

Crouching low over the flying animal's neck was a man. They only saw his face for the fraction of an instant, white in the electric ray. It was the face of a stranger.

"Man's mad—he'd have broken his neck if we had shut the gate," said Mr. Bunn. "What's he doing here, anyway? Are there any more like him left?"

He switched off his ray. Even as he did so the whirring rush of a motor suddenly started came soughing through the darkness to them, and almost immediately a dazzling blaze of lights poured down the roadway as the driver of the oncoming car switched on.

Roaring up his engine furiously and changing gear with extraordinary speed and skill, the driver of the

car was travelling dangerously fast in the narrow drive by the time he swung past the trio on the turf border. The ray of Mr. Bunn's torch was lost in the blaze from the big, powerful headlights. As the car swung past, there was just enough light to catch a glimpse of the faces of the men that were peering over the side of the car—dreadful, mask-like, yellow faces, two with black, beady, glittering eyes, one with curious, eerie eyes that, for the fraction of a second, flared with a greenish-yellow flame in the ray from the torch.

They were gone in an instant. But though two of those evil, Mongolian, oblique-eyed faces were strange, the watchers recognised the third.

It was that of Major Aldebaran Weir.

"See that," said Mr. Bunn sharply. "They've lost no time! Must have come on almost immediately he left us. Come on—let's get to the house and see what has been going on!"

They hurried down the drive, and came out on the open, gravelled space before the front door.

Mr. Bunn ran his ray over the front of the silent, lightless house, and suddenly he swore harshly, stiffening like a pointer.

"Too late, by Heaven!"

Under one of the ground-floor windows lay the body of a woman.

CHAPTER IV

IN his excitement Mr. Bunn had jumped rather wildly to the conclusion that the dark figure lying prone under the wall of the house was that of Miss Vandermonde, but as he knelt by the side of the unconscious woman flashing the ray of his electric torch on her white face he saw that it was Mrs. Bloom, the wife of their butler at Purdston Old Place.

As Fortworth joined his partner, she opened her eyes, staring up with an expression of terror.

Sing Song had disappeared, prowling round the house.

"Hello, Mrs. Bloom, what's all the trouble?" said Mr. Bunn, slipping his arm round the shoulders of the housekeeper, helping her to sit up. "I don't like seeing you this way—don't care about it at all. Easy now—don't hurry—easy, I say." He steadied the fluttering hands and spoke sharply to quell the symptoms of rising hysteria which the woman showed.

"Nobody's going to be allowed to hurt you, I tell you. Be easy. Hey? Are they gone? Sure, they're gone. What's that? Want to get up? Sure, you shall."

He raised her and holding her arm tightly, stared into the darkness of the garden and shrubberies, shivering, her eyes still a little wild.

"I—I fell from the window—" she gasped, looking up. Mr. Bunn flashed a ray upward and saw that one of the first-floor windows yawned open.

"I was tidying your room, sir, and I thought I heard my husband shout 'Help!' I listened a moment but he did not shout again. I turned to the door to go out and call downstairs to Bloom and—and there were two Chinamen. They had pistols. Somehow, it gave me a shock—although I'm used to surprises here with you gentlemen—and I rushed to the open window. I—must have fallen. And I thought I fell against a horse—I seem to remember a sound of hoofs and a man swearing before I struck my head on the ground. Where is Bloom, sir?"

She had been speaking hurriedly as the partners took her into the hall and made her sit down. Whatever they may have been in their dealings with men neither Mr. Bunn nor his partner could ever be other-wise than gentle and generous with any woman.

"Bloom? Oh, he's all right, no doubt. Capable card, Bloom. Here, you take a drink of this,"—Mr. Bunn passed her his flask-cup, half full of his sovereign remedy—rare old brandy—"and just sit here for a minute while I see where he is."

Switching on every light he approached, Mr. Bunn passed quickly out of the hall towards the kitchen. He was back almost at once.

"Nothing there," he said and went into the dining-room. He had no farther to go.

The butler was there, lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, surrounded with an assortment of silver and cutlery fallen from the overturned basket by his side.

Evidently he had been laying the table in readiness for the partners' arrival, when he had been attacked. Mr. Bunn bent over him, as Mrs. Bloom came in.

"They've killed him!" she said shrilly, but Mr. Bunn, his hands busy over the butler, laughed a little harshly.

"Sandbagged him! He's not dead! Probably be all right before long," he said.

They raised the unconscious man to the couch.

"Give him some brandy, Squire," commanded Mr. Bunn. "Where the devil is Sing Song?"

He raised his voice.

"Hey, Sing!"

"Master!" The Chink, his eyes glittering, slid soundlessly in, promptly on time as ever.

"Well, son, found anything? What were they after, anyway? Couldn't steal the house . . . hey? Come with you? You 'showee' something. All right."

They left the butler in the care of his wife and, with their pistols carefully ready, followed Sing Song out into the dark. He led them quickly down the drive, through the entrance gates and into the road. Just before they reached the spot where they had left the car the Chink halted, pointing to a dark mass at the side of the roadway. He moved past it, stepped to the car, switched on the headlamps, flooding the roadway with light and came back to the partners who were staring at the object revealed.

It was a dead horse—saddled and bridled for riding. The three craned over the animal, examining it.

"Now, whose horse is that? And why did its

owner bring it for a gallop in our drive at midnight before killing it—and if he killed it himself?” demanded Mr. Bunn.

“And why kill a horse of the class of this one, anyway?” added his partner. “It’s mighty near a thoroughbred. Very high-class hunter or steeple-chaser.”

Fortworth was right. The poor beast had been an unusually high-class animal—a bright red bay, powerful and shapely, about five years old. Less than a quarter of an hour ago they had seen this horse galloping—apparently strong and vigorous.

But now it lay, sprawled and shapeless and already oddly stiff. Its muzzle was covered with a strange greenish foam, blood-streaked and still moist.

Sing Song muttered something to himself. He knelt down and ran the big torch he had taken from the car, over the carcass, stooping low, searching and peering like a man who looks for some particular thing which he expects to find.

He found it quickly enough and stared up over his shoulder at Mr. Bunn.

“Master, you seeing——” he said softly and pointed to the horse’s neck. They craned over.

Deeply embedded, low down, near the throat, they saw the flattish base of one of those needle-pointed ivory thorns.

Carefully, Sing withdrew it.

“Now, how the devil did those Chinese man-eaters shoot that thing into the horse?” asked Mr. Bunn, “through a blowpipe or how?”

Sing Song grinned wryly.

"Me showee—you watchee. Velly easy."

He balanced the reddened splinter on the inside edge of the first and second fingers of his right hand, so that its point protruded perhaps an inch beyond the finger, and the flattened base rested against his thumb-nail, which he strained against the side of his second finger, then, half turning his wrist in a peculiar movement, he shot his thumb forward in a way that was vaguely like that of a boy shooting a marble—and the thorn darted forward to bury itself for two-thirds of its length in the neck of the horse. It pierced the tough skin with appalling ease.

"Huh! There's a devil trick, if you like," grunted Mr. Bunn. "How d'you do it, Sing?"

The Chink's grin widened.

"Allee same plactise long time—five year ten year. Onlee Cobra Tong men plactise this killee. Me showing you bimeby, master," he promised.

"And how far off have you got to be to be out of range—to be safe in fact?" pursued Mr. Bunn.

"Twainty feet—thirty—plaps forty feet. Plaps be wise you forty feet—but he hit you evely time he flickee twainty feet off. If he hit you and thorn stickee you deadee, master—allee same deadee like horse."

"Yes, damn you, I understand the deadee part of it, my son. No need to rub that in . . . unload that thorn before it does any more damage."

Mr. Bunn spoke thoughtfully.

"What's it all about, anyway?" he asked his partner. "I don't get the idea at all. Who was the rider of that horse and what was he doing here at our

place? And what was that yellow-eyed rattle-snake out of the South Chinese Army—if any—Major Aldebaran Weir, and his pals doing here for that matter? It wasn't *our* names on that slip of paper, was it? Whitney and Patricia Vandermonde were the names. I don't like it. It's a mystery, dark and damned dangerous. If this Cobra Tong has a grievance against Whitney Vandermonde how does it help 'em to sandbag *our* butler? Bloom ain't exactly a friend of the Vandermondes, and is never likely to be . . . what does that Tartar-faced tough want this house for, too? "

He turned suddenly.

"This has got to be thought out—and quick! "

His eye caught the horse.

"No need to leave that here—inviting inquiries. We don't want a crowd of police prowling about trying to solve the mystery of the Dead Horse . . . we'll attend to the animal ourselves."

They did so. Laboriously, they managed to drag the stiff carcass into their own grounds and there, in a dark and secluded corner, they left it until next day, when, after another examination, they purposed bestowing upon Sing Song and Bloom the privilege of burying it.

Then Sing brought in the car, and they went indoors to continue their investigations.

Bloom, a little shaky, was sufficiently recovered to talk. His story was told in half a dozen sentences. He was laying the table when he heard a noise at the door, looked up and found himself confronting a tall, lean man with strange yellow eyes and two Chinamen.

They were all moving into the room and the tall man was covering him with an automatic. But before he had time to speak the Chinamen, moving with extraordinary quickness, had rushed on him one from each side. He had shouted "Help," and suddenly had been beaten into the silence and blackness of insensibility by two stunning blows. The next thing he remembered was his master, Fortworth, bending over him and giving him brandy.

Mr. Bunn listened in silence to the end, then nodded in a dissatisfied sort of way.

"Well, that tells us very little," he commented. "Just as well for you, Bloom, they knocked you out before you could put up a fight. They aren't the sort of folk who stick at trifles. Did they say anything before they rushed you?"

"Not a word, sir. They came in as if they expected to see me and they knocked me out as if they had it all cut and dried hours before."

Mr. Bunn nodded.

"Yes, they're a far-sighted crowd, Bloom," he said. "Have you missed anything?"

"Not yet," replied Bloom.

"You never heard anything of the man on the horse?"

"No, sir . . . I noticed nothing out of the ordinary all the evening—oh, except, now I come to think of it, the dog. He barked a bit just after I came into the dining-room. But he stopped almost at once and I remember thinking that it must have been a stray cat that started him off."

"Ah, all right—you and your wife had better turn

in and have a good night's rest," said Mr. Bunn. "It's late and you've both had a rough evening. Help yourself to a drink, Bloom, and turn in. That'll be the programme for you."

Bloom, nothing loth, made haste to obey. He disposed of a shaken man's portion of Scotch whisky—about three inches—and disappeared.

Mr. Bunn reached for the hat he had only just laid aside.

"No, not going far," he said in response to his partner's unspoken query. "But I just want to see why old Corporal stopped barking—though I fancy I know. It's an easy guess."

With that faithful shadow, Sing Song, at his heels, he stepped through the French window and made his way round to the kennel which was the abode of the big, black, queer-tempered, cross-bred hound they kept at Purdston.

He was an ugly customer to strangers, this heavily built mixture of boar-hound, blood-hound and Airedale, which Mr. Bunn, fascinated by his air of truculence, had picked up as an overgrown puppy in a gipsy camp some three years before.

"Don't understand why old Corporal wasn't making some very rough music when we came up, Sing," muttered Mr. Bunn, as he crossed the yard at the back of the house. "I guess they've left a thorn in him, too."

But he was wrong. "They" had not wasted a "thorn" on Corporal.

Mr. Bunn and Sing Song came upon him, lying gaunt and angular, outside his kennel.

"As I thought—he's dead, hey, Sing?"

But Sing laughed sibilantly in the shadows.

"No, master—you lookee, him sandbagged allee same Bloom. Tong-men not knowing him here—no time killee. Look, master."

He disentangled a big shred of cloth from the great jaws of the dog and passed it to Mr. Bunn.

"Ah, that's from Weir's overcoat," said Mr. Bunn. "Good old Corporal. They overlooked him probably, and he burst out on them as they were prowling round the house. They beat him down and let it go at that. Pressed for time, hey? . . . Thought he was an ordinary dog, hey, Sing? That's the first bit of luck this evening, boy. Bring him in and look after him. If we can get him right before the scent gets stale I guess it won't be long before we get a claw driven into the identity of mysterious Mr. Horserider. Here's where old Corporal is going to pay off his board bill, hey, Sing? Damn you, Sing Song, I'm very pleased about this—very pleased indeed."

And so saying Mr. Bunn hurried indoors to celebrate his pleasure in his customary thirsty fashion. Certainly, as far as the curiously bred Corporal was concerned, he had reason to be pleased—for like many other creatures, human variety and otherwise, what Corporal lacked in beauty he amply made up for in usefulness. He had powers of scent which equalled those of a bloodhound, and Mr. Bunn claimed that Corporal could follow any trail to the end.

CHAPTER V

"I THINK it's about time we had a little straight talk," Mr. Bunn was saying, perhaps an hour later, when having returned from a close inspection of the interior of Purdston Old Place, and its window, door, shutter and other fastenings, he settled down in a mighty armchair facing his partner across a small table comfortably munitioned with decanters and such aids to inspiration. "So now for a little algebra. Sing, my son, stand over there where I can see you. You may have a drink. On the whole you've earned it."

His face was dark and dissatisfied—but not so thunderous as that of Fortworth—as he poured himself what he termed a "lifebuoy."

"Don't interrupt me while I'm talking, if you *don't* mind, either of you. We're in a nasty, dangerous business and I don't like it. But there's money in it, and man cannot live by bread alone, as Shakespeare puts it—or was it Charles Dickens?—one of 'em, any way. The way I read things is that this Weir wolf and his crew are up against the Vandermondes—probably old Whitney Vandermonde, for I don't see how a girl or a harmless woman could have hurt a Chinese Tong at all. But Whit—for short—is in America, so we'll say that these Chinese brothers of yours, Sing Song, under command of the Major, are aiming to injure

Whit, through his daughter. Either—for a guess—they mean to kill her or, more likely, kidnap her. But that's only a guess, and we'll have to investigate it later." . . . He paused to readjust the level of the contents of his glass.

"We shall have to stop their game for the sake of the girl and the gratitude of Whitney Vandermonde. It should work out at five figures, I estimate, though it's an early estimate, and gratitude ain't easy to put into figures at the best of times. For some reason—probably because it's the nearest house to Harchester Hall—Weir & Co. want this house. Want it as headquarters, no doubt. That's the only reason I can see. But what I don't see is why they come here behind our backs and beat the senses out of Bloom. We'd refused to sell 'em the house—and that settled it. Why batter Bloom? There's neither rhyme nor reason to it, you'd think. But unless I miss my guess by furlongs this he-wolf Weir doesn't do things without a reason. When we find the rider of that horse no doubt we shall be on our way. First thing, therefore, is to find that rider. We'll do that to-morrow with luck, and provided old Corporal can smell as well as usual."

He finished his glass.

"Also we must make the acquaintance of this Miss Vandermonde. Shall have to arrange that—pay a friendly call there to-morrow, and get acquainted."

Fortworth snorted slightly, and Mr. Bunn cocked an angry eye at him.

"Well? Any objection?"

"I don't suppose Miss Vandermonde will be any too

grateful for our acquaintance," said Fortworth. "You've got to remember that she is—or will be—one of the wealthiest women in the world, and it ain't very likely that she's exactly short of, or in need of, two more acquaintances. Suppose she turned us down."

"Nobody," responded Mr. Bunn, with dignity, "nobody has the right to turn down two private English gentlemen of means, manners and leisure. Leave the social stuff to *me*—I understand it. . . . What I want to see you two revolving your brains round is the fact that Weir & Co. are dangerous, and quick, and deadly—and armed with arms they won't hesitate to use, any more than their little friend the Cobra hesitates to use his fangs when in the mood. . . . And the chief of this crowd was introduced to us by Esme Fay-Lacy—whom we've known for years—must get into touch with her to-morrow. I've got an idea that she doesn't quite know what kind of a scorpion she's got hold of in this Major Aldebaran Weir——"

He paused for a moment.

"Anybody got anything to say? How about you, Squire? Any ideas?"

But Fortworth was devoid of ideas and hesitated not at all to say so. Lacking data, he observed (though less elegantly), he had arrived at no conclusions.

"Well, you then, Sing Song. Have you told us all you know—or can guess?"

But Sing never answered that straightforward question, for at that moment the huge, gaunt, heavy-jowled hound, sprawling on the hearth at Mr. Bunn's feet, raised his fierce, ugly head, growling low down in

his throat. His brown, bloodshot eyes gleamed dully in the light.

They had brought him round, but he had been heavy and dazed for the past hour. Now he had partially recovered.

His corrugated mask seemed to knot itself into a hundred new wrinkles as his lips writhed back from his white fangs, and the stiff hairs on his shoulders and along the line of his backbone stood up like porcupine spines. He raised himself and threw up his head for the deep note—half bay, half bark—he usually sounded, but Mr. Bunn grabbed him swiftly by the throat.

"Quiet, Corp—*quiet!*" he said softly, menacing the hound with his left fist.

Corporal understood, and was silent.

"Listen!" whispered Mr. Bunn.

The three, companions in many a tense moment, listened tautly.

For a moment they heard nothing.

Then, very low, came the faint sound of footsteps on the gravel path outside moving quietly round the house. . . . Stealthy steps . . .

Mr. Bunn flushed an even deeper red, glancing at the clock. Twenty minutes past one!

"They're working round the house," he said softly. "And who the devil is it thinks that they've got a right to come prowling round here at twenty past one at night?"

He stood up suddenly

"We'll have a look," he whispered angrily. "These Chinks, hey?" he demanded, staring at Sing.

But Sing Song shook his head, his eyes glittering.

"No, master. That boot allee same nailee sole—not Chinaman boot. You going, me coming, master—we seeing bimeby him English boot crunchee gravel."

He slid from his chair, and a wicked-looking knife gleamed in his hand, appearing, it seemed, by magic from nowhere.

"Put it up, you!" said Mr. Bunn in a half-snarled whisper. "If that's no Chink outside you can cut out the solo on the knife. Give it here, boy. *I* will say when knives are called for."

He took the weapon from the reluctant Chink and put it on the high mantelpiece.

"Now make for the French window facing the lawn. He was working round that way. We'll slip the bolt and be ready to fall on him. Quiet, Corp—and stop here. We'll need you to-morrow."

In the morning-room, with its French window, they paused to listen. Almost at once came the faint jar of a nailed shoe or boot on the tiled floor of the little verandah outside the window.

They heard the thin squeak of the handle of the French window as the prowler gently tested it.

"Still! Keep still," breathed Mr. Bunn. "He's coming in. Wait till he's well inside—then rush him. Easy, now."

They sensed and heard rather than saw the slight inward bulge of the window as the prowler put a testing pressure on it at top and bottom to discover whether there were bolts as well as a lock.

There were, and for a few moments the man outside made no further movement audible to the three inside

the room. Then a low, steady rasp, very harsh and slow, jarred quietly from the outside.

"He's diamond-cutting a pane," breathed Smiler. "Wait on him—wait on——"

He did not finish, for a sudden, loud jangling jet of sound dinned across the dark silence, muffled in a moment by the deep note of Corporal—who probably was as startled as themselves.

The telephone in the room they had just left was ringing furiously. There was a quick, light clatter of hasty feet on the verandah outside, dying out at once.

"Gone, damn him! He's away like a fox. After him, Sing! Get him, boy."

The Chink shot across the room, snatching at the key and bolts of the French window. But the bolts normally unused, were stiff and delayed him badly.

Mr. Bunn and his partner were at the telephone long before Sing Song was out of the house . . .

"Hello!" snarled Smiler, most uncordially. "Hello! who's that—ringing up at this ungodly time o' night. Hey? Oh, you, is it, Esme? You ought to be in bed—hey?—hello—yes, tucked up in bed, I say. What's that? Hello? Are you there? . . . *It's Mrs. Fay-Lacy, very excited,*" he said in an aside to his partner. "Hello! What is it? Are you there?—can't hear a word you say. *There's some guy cross-talking into the machine, Squire, like a d—d ghost calling out of a coal-mine somewhere—hey, you there, what's that?—Charmian Vandermonde doesn't guess that Fan Tzu Kang and his men are—what—what? Are you there? Hello! Are you—where the h—l are you—who are you?—what's that? Oh,*

you again, Esme, is it? There was a guy cross-talking about Sam Sue Kang—what's that? You're sorry—sorry, yes, I've got that—sorry Major Aldebaran Weir isn't the person you thought he was—your friend is another man altogether—what's that?—muddle? Mix-up? No idea who he is . . . All right—all right, Esme. I understand. No—no harm . . . Eh? Explain later. Sure, Esme. Lunch with me one day, go into things. Knew you were too much my style to put me on to a crook like Weir—oh, sure, sure—yes—good-night—time you were in bed—yes,—certainly—tucked up in your little white bed—and switching off your pretty pink electric light—not pink—yellow—ha-ha—well, well—good-night ! ”

He hung up and turned to his partner.

“ That was Esme Fay-Lacy—only an excited maniac kept butting in. She rang up to warn us that she's discovered that Major Aldebaran Weir ain't the particular friend from abroad that was recommended to her. Some mistake about letters of introduction. She had just found out and as she fancied Weir was a bad lot she thought she couldn't do less than warn us. . . . But I was more interested in that other guy who was trying to talk about Patricia Charmian and Tam Sue Kang—eh, well, Fan Tzu Kang, then—but I couldn't get any sense out of him. He had a touch of an American accent, I thought, and he must have meant Miss Vandermonde, anyway. It looks as if Fan Tzu Kang is this Major Weir—this mysterious guy spoke of him and 'his men.' . . . Now, what about that creeping Joseph we sent Sing after? We'd better see——”

They turned back to the morning-room, only to meet Sing Song coming in ruefully.

"Me solly, master. Him gone too far allee same too quick. Me no seeing, no catchee." His eyes gleamed as he held up a tweed cap.

"But can do, master. Findee cappee—Colpril smellee him. Please, you coming quick!"

He handed the cap—an ordinary grey cloth affair—to Mr. Bunn.

He took it, glancing rather sourly at the clock.

"Creeping on towards two a.m.," he said. "And you, you thundering mixture of wire and whipcord, want us to go chasing over hill and dale after the owner of this cap, with a poor devil of a hound who probably has had his sense of smell battered clean out of his body for the next twenty-four hours. However—" he turned the cap over, scrutinising it carefully—"no name, no trade-mark, huh!—however, we'd better follow it up, if we can, hey, Squire?"

Fortworth agreed, with the sullen air of a buffalo-bull goaded by mosquitoes into a thoroughly dangerous state of mind.

"Then, just come in and take something to keep the cold out, and we'll lay old Corp on—if he's willing."

This they did. It was a warm night, but, as Mr. Bunn said, over a quick stimulator, it was liable to turn cold at any moment.

Within five minutes, Corporal, after muzzling the cap, had picked up the scent on the verandah, and was straining ominously against the strong steel chain with which Sing Song—as the fastest runner of the trio—was holding him in.

"Right? Better take our guns! We're on the side of law and order," said Mr. Bunn, dropping his automatic in his pocket. He added a flask to his armament and, pausing only to select from a stand in the hall an excessively butt-ended oak stick that would have been "highly recommended" in any shillelagh exhibition, he and his partner followed the Chinaman and the hound into the night.

"Ought to be in bed, as a matter of fact," he muttered as he went. He glanced up at the sky. It was clearing a little. Occasionally the moon peered anxiously from behind the black herd of wild-looking clouds that were sailing swiftly across the sky shepherded by a south-west wind.

"Shall be able to see our way—some of the time," said Mr. Bunn. "Get on, Sing. And keep the hound mute—and in hand. I don't envy the man he gets his jaws on this night! No, sir. And the man I get mine on will be a case for cauterising, believe me!"

CHAPTER VI

RUNNING silently, his nose low to the ground, the black hound led them swiftly across the lawn along a narrow, winding path through the shrubbery to a small paddock. He hesitated a moment here, then picked up the scent again, and crossed the paddock to the boundary wall which divided the partners' comparatively modest domain from the deer park surrounding Harchester Hall. He checked at the wall, snuffing, and raising himself, his fore-paw against the wall.

"Hullo, what's this?" said Mr. Bunn, surprised. "Did Mr. Nighthawk come from the Hall? He certainly seems to have headed back there. Get the damn dog over, Sing, get him over," he added irritably. "We can't stand here admiring the back view of him all night!"

Between them they lifted the hound over, and rather laboriously followed him.

He caught the trail at once and headed straight across the park towards the Hall.

"Don't understand this—don't understand it at all," panted Mr. Bunn, rolling after the Chink and his keen-scented guide, with Fortworth. "Don't know that I like it, either. Shall begin to ask myself a lot of awkward questions if we track Mr. Nighthawk

to the Hall. What does anyone there want prowling around our place at this hour, hey? "

But, however that may have been, it was straight to the big house that the Corporal steered them.

He went without a falter past the big range of stabling and through a little maze of buildings and yards at the back, half-circled the huge stone pile and ran, whining low, to a standstill at a small, unobtrusive arched door, studded with heavy iron nailheads, behind a buttress angle at the side of the house.

Here, perforce, he halted; he set his heavy, wrinkled muzzle to the narrow crack between the stone sill and the door, and snuffed hungrily.

The partners stared.

"This is—very unexpected," said Mr. Bunn softly, mopping his brow. "He went in here—that's as sure as a rabbit goes to his hole. What are we going to do about it, hey? "

He peered at the keyhole, and flashed his light over every inch of the door.

"Been oiled recently at the hinges," he muttered. "Some of it has leaked through. Not used a lot, I should say. New step—cement, too. Not stone. Evidently put in by someone in a hurry. Hasn't been dry long. Probably put in when they were getting it smartened up for the Vandermonde tenancy—though I don't see Patricia using this semi-back door much."

He scowled in the moonlight at his companions, thinking hard.

"Let's look, now—we want to meet the lady,

anyway. How would it be to knock her up and notify her that we've just chased a burglar into her establishment? It ain't strictly true, no doubt, but it would be the civil thing and a neighbourly act, and it ought to get a neighbourly friendship well started."

Fortworth grunted slightly.

"I don't see that—and I doubt it. I shouldn't feel that I owed any friendship to any guy that chased a thief out of his house into mine," he demurred.

"He led us here—and he's no thief," explained Mr. Bunn. "However, perhaps you're right, though probably you're wrong. Let's take a look round—as we're here."

There could be no harm in that and they proceeded to act accordingly, moving quietly and cautiously round to the front of the big house.

Except for a window or two on the first floor and one on the ground floor, the place was in darkness.

The curtains of the lower windows were only partially drawn, and leaving the others in the deep shadow of one of the enormous cedar trees which dotted the wide area of roughly circular lawn before the west front of the house, and around which the wide carriage drive circled, Mr. Bunn moved cautiously to this window to investigate.

Peering in, over the heavy stone sill, he saw a large and comfortable study or library, extremely well furnished, brightly lighted and with a blazing fire, before which, at a big writing table, sat a man, his back to the fire, his profile to Mr. Bunn.

He was a youngish man, with keen, bold features, Smiler judged, and he seemed to be extremely busy

with some of the many papers and books on the table before him.

"Looks like the secretary putting in a little overtime on his accounts," hazarded the old adventurer in his mind as he watched.

Even as he decided this the man in the library glanced at a clock behind him and verified the clock by his watch. He frowned a little, thrust aside his papers, and drummed his fingers lightly on the table.

Then he lit a cigarette, jumped up and turned towards the window. Mr. Bunn dropped silently into the shadow under the sill. A moment later he heard the click of a window catch released and almost immediately over his head a window swung open.

"Hah, that's better," said the man who had opened it, drawing a deep breath.

Mr. Bunn lay still. He knew that only a few feet above him the occupant of the room, probably grateful for a breath of cool night air, after the heated atmosphere within, was standing at the open window staring out.

"Nearly two—they should be here," mused the man, quite audibly. "And—if that light means anything here they come!"

Mr. Bunn heard the faint shuffle of a slipper on the oak floor, waited a few seconds, caught a slight chink of glasses from inside the room and softly raised his head.

The man had left the window, closing it behind him.

With extreme caution, Mr. Bunn peered in again through the narrow opening of the curtains. The "overtime" worker was fiddling at a cellaret at one

side of the room, producing decanters and glasses which he set on the table at which he had been working.

Then, from over the carriage sweep, issuing apparently from under the inky shadows around the trunk of the cedar, came a tiny sound—a faint hiss.

Mr. Bunn heard it, understood it, and silently retreated from the window to rejoin his fellow prowlers in the shadows.

“What is it? Somebody coming, hey?”

“Looks like it—a car with lights has pulled up somewhere down by the entrance to the park,” muttered Fortworth.

“Ah—he’s expecting somebody. Queer time o’ night for visitors. We’ll watch this. May mean nothing—but we’ll see. Keep the dog quiet or there will be trouble, Sing.”

They waited silently, peering from behind the cedar trunk down the drive that paled and darkened intermittently as the clouds overhead veiled and unveiled the moon.

“Here they are. Nice time of night to pay a friendly visit,” breathed Mr. Bunn.

Three dark figures were coming up the drive to the house. Walking close in to the side, on the mossy turf, they made no sound. There were two men and a woman in a long cloak.

Softly these people of the night approached the house, and the watchers saw the great main door open soundlessly for a foot or two to receive them. It was as though a gap in a cliff had opened and they had vanished through it.

Instantly Mr. Bunn swung into action.

"Scoot away down the drive and get their car number, Squire," he instructed his partner. "Watch out for the driver—he'll be a wideawake wolf, if I'm any judge. There's a big mix-up here—Chinese puzzle, you may say—but we'll get to the bottom of it, or you can call me no conjurer. Sing, stop here, and keep the dog muffled."

He went soundlessly across to the window again. . . .

Somebody had taken a passing pluck at the curtains again and the gap had narrowed. But it was not closed, though Mr. Bunn's range of vision was restricted.

Yet he saw enough to puzzle him. He got a surprise at once. In a vague, sketchy sort of way he had decided in his own mind that of the two men of this party one, at least, would prove to be the man with the yellow eyes. It was a guess—but as a rule he usually guessed about right.

But this time he was wide of the mark.

The two men were clearly English or American. He saw that at once, even though neither remained within his line of sight longer than was necessary for each to help himself to a drink. One was a young, good-looking, almost "nut-like" individual with brushed-back hair; the other an older, craggy-faced, dark-jowled man, rather like an old actor.

They moved aside, each with his glass, and the woman came forward.

She had dropped her cloak and stood revealed in an expensive and very attractive evening dress of cornflower blue.

Mr. Bunn, ever susceptible to feminine charm, nodded his head gently in approval.

She was "his style."

Although she was far less striking in appearance than, for example, the fire-crested Mrs. Fay-Lacy, she was more pleasant-looking. Probably about twenty-six, she was a very attractive figure. To say that she was over-abundant would be incorrect—but she was generously shapely, comfortable, mellow—in short, Mr. Bunn's style in that there were no sharp angles about her. She was picturesque and quite charming. Her hair was dark, almost black, and she possessed a lovely complexion. And dark eyes—brown, Mr. Bunn fancied.

She was standing perfectly still looking down at the keen-featured man at the desk who was staring at her intently. Once he rose, and moving close to her, stared into her eyes from a distance of a few inches so fixedly that he might have been trying to hypnotise her. Then suddenly he caught her hands and examined them intently, paying special attention to the backs of the fingers. Next he studied her white, bare arms—beautifully moulded arms—and smiled like a man well pleased. Then he pushed back her hair and looked at her ears. He nodded and fixed a diamond earring in one, nodded again and removed the jewel. Next he surveyed her feet, laughed, and spoke, glancing at the others.

The lady laughed also and, apparently unencumbered with any excess of modesty, lifted her gleaming silk frock to her knees, displaying what was probably some excellent hosiery. Mr. Bunn irritably muttered

under his breath something about the table being in his way.

"Probably wants to buy a slave," he told himself acidly. "That chap would be quite at home in any Central African slave market. Next thing you know he'll be weighing her."

But he was wrong—the next thing the keen-faced one did was to study the teeth of the lady.

Then suddenly he offered his hand and, smilingly, she shook hands.

The actor-like man passed her a glass of wine, and, taking a cigarette from a box on the table, she sat down.

Mystified to the point of anger, Mr. Bunn stared in, listening intently. But they must have been talking very softly, for he could not catch a sound.

"I like that dame—she's a broad-minded sort of girl," he mused. "No duckling, true—but in the prime of life, as you may say!"

Within ten minutes the lady, who had been seated in Mr. Bunn's view throughout, finished her refreshments and rose. The "nut-like" youth appeared again to the watcher, holding her cloak for her. He had on his own coat and hat.

Evidently they were on the point of leaving.

Mr. Bunn did not linger.

Silently, he stole back to the shelter of the darkness under the cedar. Sing Song and Corporal were there—but of Fortworth there was no sign.

Mr. Bunn watched the great front door of the house. He was not disappointed.

Within a minute the three figures appeared—two

men and a woman—and went down the drive, disappearing into the moving, moon-changing shadows as silently and mysteriously as they came.

“Well—what do you make of that, you heathen?” breathed Mr. Bunn to his retainer.

Sing Song made nothing of it.

“Give ’em a minute’s grace and we’ll follow ’em,” said Mr. Bunn, and stole back to the window for a final glance.

But he got a shock when he gazed in.

The keen-faced man he had first seen was still there—and so was the plump lady. She was standing by the table, talking to the man. She had removed her cloak again and was now wearing an elaborately embroidered kimono. In her hand she held a book. Even as Mr. Bunn realised that she had not left the house after all, she smiled, said “Good-night,” and disappeared. It was the first actual sound of speech Mr. Bunn had heard.

The man in the room yawned, stretched, drank a whisky-and-soda, and a minute later moved to the door himself, reaching for the switch.

Then room was in darkness.

“Gone to bed,” said Mr. Bunn. “Time I was there, too.”

He moved back to the cedar.

“But if she didn’t leave the house after all, who the devil was that woman I’ve just seen go down the drive with those two men?” he asked himself.

There was no answer forthcoming.

“Come on, Sing, it’s a Chinese puzzle all right. But if we don’t get the answer of it before many hours

you can kick me from here to Charing Cross, my lad," he promised.

They went cautiously down the drive.

But the people they were stalking were evidently wasting very little time in leaving, for before Mr. Bunn and the Chink were halfway a sudden radiance of light in the darkness some distance ahead, and the low sound of a motor-engine suddenly started, warned them that the night callers were on their way from Purdston.

"All right, let them go, my son. We shall get all the news we can expect about them from Mr. Black."

They pressed on down the drive.

Mr. Bunn was beginning to get anxious about his partner, and by the time they reached the great entrance gates without seeing Fortworth or any sign of him, his anxiety was swiftly changing into serious concern.

Slowly they retraced their steps, sharp-eyed and listening.

They were about halfway back when the black hound snatched at the leash wound round Sing Song's wrist, and lurched with a savage growl towards a dense clump of rhododendron shrubs a few yards off the road.

"Look out, Sing!" jarred Mr. Bunn, wheeling.

Two men came reeling round the shrubs apparently locked together in a life and death struggle.

But they broke apart as Mr. Bunn turned—and one swung a savage blow at the other as they broke. The thud of the blow came dully across to Mr. Bunn,

and the man who had received it pitched headlong to the ground.

The other paused for a fraction of a second, staring at Mr. Bunn.

A cloud blew clear of the moon, and for an instant this man stood full in the cold white light.

It was not a difficult matter to recognise Major Aldebaran Weir, of the South Chinese Army—or Fan Tzu Kang of the Cobra Tong.

They heard him laugh acidly as he disappeared into the dense blackness of the main shrubbery.

Smiler Bunn bent over the body of the man on the ground.

It was Fortworth.

But it took Mr. Bunn no more than a few seconds to discover that his partner was merely "knocked out." The burly Fortworth was quickly on his feet again—though still distinctly shaky. But less shaky than sheer fighting mad.

"The reptile had on a set of iron knuckle-dusters that would have brained a buffalo," he growled, mopping the blood that poured from a deep cut high up on the cheek-bone. "I tell you—I thought he had hit me with a steel hammer!"

His bear-like temper flamed up volcanically.

"Mind you—mind this—when we get our hands on him he's *mine*! Nobody has got to get between him and me. I tell you now—this punch is going home to roost on him before long."

He glared round in the moonlight.

"Where is he?"

But Mr. Bunn soothed him.

"Oh, he bolted long ago. Miles away by now—if he isn't lurking in some of these shrubs with an automatic or a fistful of poisoned thorns ready for the first fool that tries to get next to him."

"Try Corporal out on his trail. I want him—I want him bad," jarred Fortworth.

"Later on, later on, Squire," he said. "Too late now. We've done some good work and a lot of it to-night. And we've learned a lot. I'm satisfied—so far." He dropped his voice, leading them out into the open, away from those dangerous shrubs.

"I can tell you this," he went on. "I've got wise to part of the game. Our yellow-eyed young friend and his crew are all out to kidnap Miss Vandermonde—but what's worrying me is this: Do they want to do this for profit—or for some other reason—revenge, for instance? Or as some sort of weapon against Whitney Vandermonde?"

He quickened his pace.

"However, we can do no more here now. Let's get back to the house. It's getting on for sunrise—or soon will be."

Reluctantly, his partner allowed himself to accept Mr. Bunn's advice and they made their way back to their own place.

They had had an excessively busy evening, and, as Mr. Bunn very truly observed as they entered the house, what their problem needed now was to be taken to bed with them for a few hours and kept there.

It was, perhaps, ten minutes after Mr. Bunn had gone to his room that a shadow came flitting, silent

as a ghost, up the stairs. It was Sing Song, the Chink.

He bore a couple of thick rugs under his arm.

For a moment he listened outside his master's door. Then he nodded, his teeth gleaming faintly in the cold moonlight that filtered in through a window at the end of the corridor, and, noiselessly adjusting the rugs, he curled up on the mat.

Then he stretched out a yellow hand, placing a long, curved, wicked-looking knife on the floor beside him. He left his hand resting on the hilt of the knife and settled down to a few hours of that light, cat-like dozing which, on occasion, seemed to serve him for sleep.

So the Chink got his rest—on guard in a darkness lightened only by the cold glimmer of the moonlight on the naked steel of the blade under his yellow, talon-like hand.

Sing Song had not been curled up at his post an hour before a faint noise from outside brought his head up like that of a roused snake. He listened, sharp-eared as an owl.

Outside, very soft and stealthy, he had caught the sound of footsteps again—prowling, prowling. . . .

The yellow man glided to the window at the end of the corridor, peering out.

Already, the steely greyness of the coming dawn lightened the edge of the eastern sky.

Staring down into the gloom below, much as a panther may stare down at danger passing under the tree in which, unsuspected, it watches, Sing Song looked down to see, in the shadow-filled, waning

moonlight, a deeper shadow, the form of a man, come stealing down the path outside.

And another shadow followed it, moving through the gloom, like a hunting beast of prey following its mate.

CHAPTER VII

BUT the coming of these shadowy forms, the first faint noise of whose approach had roused the yellow watcher from his position on guard outside Mr. Bunn's door, resulted in nothing more serious than a quarter of an hour's intense, strained and ghostly-silent activity on the part of Sing Song.

The prowlers made no attempt to enter the house—contenting themselves with a watchful and cautious circling of the place. Window after window the Chink visited, cat-footed, to peer down, keeping the two men below under observation.

It was as though they had come to satisfy themselves that the night was normal at Purdston Old Place, that its occupants had retired like normal people, and that no unusual activities were taking place there.

Sing Song, returned to the corridor window, seemed to realise this, for he grinned a little as in the slowly increasing first light of dawn, he stared down, still clutching his knife, and watching the two figures move away, still no more than a pair of shadows moving through shadows.

They went away in the direction of Harchester Hall.

Then the Chinaman turned again to Mr. Bunn's doorway, thought for a moment, and picked up his rugs.

"Master allee same hungly when he waking. Make him good blekfast—him good man. Allee same good blekfast for good master—*hee!*"

He gave a thin, wiry giggle at his little joke, and faded away downstairs. He was an extraordinary heathen, and if he said any prayers at all it is probable that he addressed them exclusively if secretly to Mr. Bunn.

He had slept for perhaps as much as forty minutes in the last twenty-four hours—and it looked extremely likely that he would get very little more sleep for the next eighteen hours—but he appeared quite happy about it. Not for nothing had Mr. Bunn, in moments of badinage, called him "Old Indestructible"—with a touch of possessive pride. They had been through some curious adventures together, these two, and Sing Song idolised his master, Mr. Bunn.

There were no more alarms or interruptions, and though it was a little later than usual when Mr. Bunn, arrayed in easy, country tweeds, appeared in the dressing room, his brisk, cheery and confident demeanour justified the extra slumber.

"Well, Sing Song, my son, it's a very fine morning," he announced—"very fine. What's for breakfast? How are Bloom's bruises and Mrs. Bloom's feelings? Mr. Black will be having his breakfast upstairs this morning. Make a nice pleasant tray for him, Sing, and just run up with a brandy-and-soda for him—to give him an appetite. That was a nasty cut on the face he collected last night——"

He moved to the window, gazing out. It was a glorious morning with a blazing sun in a clear sky,

tempered with a gentle east wind that put a sparkle in the air. For some minutes the old rascal stared out thoughtfully. Then as Sing Song, having arranged about Fortworth's nourishment, returned to serve breakfast, Mr. Bunn turned.

"A very interesting business this, my son," he said, "and I hang no festoons round my neck when I say that I am handling it extremely well. Yes. What's this—*sole à la Colbert*? Well, well, it's a very sound way to treat a sole, very. Colbert, whoever he may have been, or his wife more likely, certainly knew how to dope out a flatfish, Sing. Sole is a fish you don't want to play the fool with, and it was a very pretty idea of Mrs. Colbert to remove the backbone of a fried sole, stuff it with fine herb butter, and let it go at that. Neat—and not gaudy——

"The thing we've got to bear in mind about this business of the Cobra Tong is secrecy, Sing. Understand me, now. Don't discuss it with anybody—the Blooms or anybody else. We've got a lot to do and very little time to do it in. Fortunately, I am on deck and at the wheel. . . . Secrecy—speed—silence. We've got to handle things for a time as I handled 'em last night. A bit of good work that, boy. Here I was handling my men in silence and secrecy. Looking around, learning things, gathering up my clues, and—bar Weir—not a soul the wiser—not a soul—what's this——"

Mr. Bunn broke off his amiable and self-complacent prattle abruptly as Bloom, lumpy-headed, with his eyes still slightly bloodshot, entered with a letter on a salver. Mr. Bunn took it. It was unstamped.

He slit it open and ran an eye over it, and a slow flush ran into his heavy, good-humoured face. He glanced at the door to assure himself that Bloom had closed it behind him, then addressed his Chinese familiar.

"Well, maybe I was wrong about the secrecy and silence last night," he muttered. "Miss Vandermonde seems to be pretty wise to everything we did—up to a point. Listen to this, Sing :

"*Harchester Hall,*
"*Purdston.*

" ' Miss Vandermonde's secretary, Mr. Arnold Scanlon, presents his compliments to Mr. Wilton Flood, and his friend, Mr. Henry Black, and would be grateful if they would call upon him at three o'clock this afternoon and explain the reasons which impelled them to visit the grounds of Harchester Hall last night. Mr. Scanlon is well aware that neither Mr. Flood nor Mr. Black is likely to have paid this nocturnal visit for inadequate reasons or for motives of idle curiosity, but he is at a loss to understand why, having made their way across the park, they should have lingered at the side door, under the cedar at the front, at the window of the library and subsequently have proceeded down the drive—with the visitors who left by motor-car. And he trusts also that they may be able to set his mind at rest concerning the blood-splashes by the large rhododendron shrubs half-way down the drive.

" ' Mr. Scanlon desires it to be appreciated that he has excellent reason for this inquiry on behalf of Miss Vandermonde, and that he will be extremely grateful

for any light which Mr. Flood or Mr. Black cares to shed upon the matter.’¹

“No—we weren’t so damned secret after all, my son,” muttered Mr. Bunn. “If this man had been following us with a portable kinema box he couldn’t have been much wiser about our movements.”

He placed the note by his plate and studied it in thoughtful silence throughout the lengthy breakfast.

“Arnold Scanlon, is it?” he soliloquised, as he selected a cigar and strolled to the window to gaze out over the sunny garden. “Well, Arnold, you certainly have got me guessing this morning. Your tone is friendly—so I see I have to keep a sharp lamp out on you. These friendly guys—don’t like ’em, don’t like ’em at all. Shall certainly have to drop in on you this afternoon, laddie, and get your measure.”

He turned on the flitting Sing Song busy salving the wreckage of his owner’s breakfast.

“How’s the dog this morning, Sing?”

The Chink grinned.

“Colpril allee same lumpy head, master—but velly good eatee.”

“No doubt, no doubt. Never knew a dog that couldn’t eatee a breakfast that would choke a giraffe. But the thing is, can he smell this morning? Is he eager? It takes a tough proposition, be it man or dog, to be eager the morning after being knocked out—like Corporal and Mr. Black and Bloom were last night,” explained Mr. Bunn.

¹ Wilton Flood and Henry Black were the names for which Smiler Bunn and ex-Lord Forthworth had long ago discarded their own names.

But Sing Song reassured him, and Mr. Bunn grew brisk.

"Good—that's very good. Shall have to give him a bone or two extra per week, ha-ha! Give him a rise, in fact!"

He laughed heartily at his jest, then sat at a table at the side of the room and drew writing materials to him.

"Get yourself ready to do a bit of outdoor work with me in about a quarter of an hour, Sing," he commanded. "I shall be ready for you just as soon as I've sent a cable."

Sing Song vanished, and Mr. Bunn applied himself diligently to condensed composition.

When a little later Sing Song, in his chauffeur's outfit, entered silently, Mr. Bunn had achieved his cable, and, seeming rather proud of it, was softly intoning it to himself. It was directed to one Tony Bohun, at an address in Chicago, and ran as follows:—

"Notify me immediately reasons if any Whitney Vandermonde liable to attentions of highbinders, tongmen, plug-uglys, blackjackers, thornshooters, or other species Chinks. Urgent, valuable, and a percentage to you.—JOHN."

"How's that, Sing? Straight and to the point. Remember my brother, Mr. Tony Bohun, and Miss Fanchon Grey, the lady he married, do you, Sing? We hunted with them that time Kate the Gun, from Chicago, had laid herself out to exterminate you and me. They were detectives in New York in those days and they still are that—only they've got their own

agency in Chicago now. Seems a long time ago, Sing, all that business, hey? We've kind of got on since then. And we've earned it, boy. Right—no need to get sentimental. He's a nice lad is my brother Tony, and his wife Fanchon is a goldfinch. A little too slim and slender to be quite my style, but a sweet charming girl, Sing, and a good wife to my brother Tony. And both of 'em always ready to stand by me. . . . Just flash down to the post office like a streak of lightning on the motor skate, send off this cable, and flash back. I'll be ready for you."

Sing departed to get the powerful motor-cycle which the partners allowed him for emergencies, and Mr. Bunn thoughtfully made his way upstairs to see how Fortworth was progressing.

He found his partner in slippers and dressing-gown, snarling the most blood-curdling criticisms of Bloom's valeting abilities what time Bloom was endeavouring to shave him without causing the deep cut on his cheekbone to twinge. One of his eyes was magnificently blackened.

Mr. Bunn did not ask him how he felt, for he was (he claimed) a man naturally gifted with great tact. He glanced at the table by the side of Fortworth's bed and nodded to himself. His partner was feeling almost cannibalistically well—judging by what he had done to his breakfast.

Mr. Bunn spoke dourly.

"I'm going after Mr. Nightrider with the hound, Squire," he said, as Bloom finished with the razor.

"The h——l you are—and I'm coming," growled Fortworth. "I've got to get right into the thick of this

business, and the sooner the better. . . . Get a move on, Bloom. My clothes—my *clothes*, man ! ” he bawled.

“ I’ve got an idea that when we find out where the man who rode that horse is we shall find Mister Major Aldebaran Weir, *of* the South Chinese Army, not far away.”

Fortworth nodded grimly.

He was dressing too fast for conversation.

Mr. Bunn smiled, quite satisfied. It was abundantly evident to him that Fortworth was yearning heart and body and soul to get into action. That was what he wanted—action and plenty of it—harsh, rude and violent action. He was perfectly satisfied to leave the thinking and planning to that astute old rascal, Mr. Bunn. All *he* wanted his partner to do was to lead him to an object and say unto him, “ There you are ! Go to it ! ”

Fortworth was a grizzly bear for action now—and all he asked was to be provided with opportunities, and to be given room according to his strength. He was, in his way, a man of simple and uncomplex nature, and he was now quite willing to believe Mr. Bunn’s statement that Miss Vandermonde was in danger of being kidnapped by Major Aldebaran Weir and his Tong-men, that their plans must be discovered and spoiled, and that a very large financial acknowledgment of his gratitude must be steered from the multi-millionaire uncle of the lady to the partners. Fortworth accepted all that without demur—but it was with a very great deal of demur that he accepted the deep cut on his cheek and the hideously discoloured eye, which the man with the yellow eyes had inflicted on him.

CHAPTER VIII

ABNORMALLY keen-scented though the black cross-bred was, the partners found it by no means easy to set him on the trail of the mysterious rider of the dead horse. At first they made their starting-point the spot where they had found the horse lying at the side of the road, but all Corporal could do for them was to lead them from that spot to the carcase in the shrubbery. Thrice they did this—vastly to the interest of a hard-faced man, a stranger, who, apparently enjoying a pleasant morning stroll in company with a decidedly unpleasant cigar, halted to watch them.

At the third trial, he spoke.

"Hunting, friends?" he inquired, affably.

"You can call it that," said Mr. Bunn briefly, perspiring over his efforts.

"Say, what you hunting?"

Mr. Bunn laughed shortly.

"We're hunting for a strong smell," he replied.

The stranger stared at the faintly ironical tone.

"Well, I sure hope you find it," he observed drily.

Mr. Bunn noted the American accent of the stranger, and ran an interested eye over him. He had him classified in an instant.

The man was a detective, and if the keen, grey

eyes, the tight lips, firm jaw, broad forehead and well-shaped head were anything to go by, a good and competent detective.

Mr. Bunn's greenish eyes grew blank as he studied the man. He was pondering the reason why an American detective should bob up at Purdston. But he did not need to ponder long. It was obvious enough. Whitney Vandermonde was not in the least likely to allow his heiress to go incompletely guarded.

He smiled.

"I'm glad to have your good wishes, my friend," he observed, "but there don't appear to be any smells lying loose about here—if there are the dog don't seem to be in any mood to collect 'em—or," he added, a cold and clammy eye on the black cigar, "or, maybe, he don't stand high enough on his legs to get the full blast of 'em, so to put it."

He signed to Sing Song to follow him and they re-entered their own grounds.

For a moment the detective stared thoughtfully after them, then moved on down the road at a leisurely stroll.

Five minutes later the trio with the hound emerged again. They had picked up the trail made by the horse on its way to the house, and were tracing it back.

Corporal hesitated a little as he passed the spot where the horse had lain—but this was at the side of the road some three yards away from the old trail, and they got him past it. He went slowly, for the scent was elusive and baffling.

But presently it ran on to a narrow strip of turf

bordering the road and strengthened. The pace quickened a little.

Half a mile from the gates of Purdston Old Place the hound stopped dead, whining. He quested busily about, snuffling—but he had lost the trail.

Mr. Bunn bent over the faint hoof-marks on the dusty, wind-dried and sun-hardened turf, studying them carefully.

A motor-cyclist, hooded and goggled, and hunched over his powerful machine, roared past, peering curiously through his huge mica eye-protectors as he passed.

Mr. Bunn, concentrating on the hoof-marks, hardly noticed him. About a hundred yards past them something seemed to go wrong with the motor-cyclist's engine. It began to back-fire intermittently in a series of loud reports. . . .

"Well, the damned horse couldn't have flown through the air on wings to this spot," said Mr. Bunn. "And as the last visible hoof-marks are deeper than any we've seen yet, and are close to the hedge, and as the hedge is fairly low, and beyond it is a grass field, it stands to reason that at this spot Mr. Rider either jumped the hedge from the field side—or pulled his horse on to the turf from the road. Corporal would have picked up the scent if it had run on to the road—so we'll see what we can find on the other side of the hedge. Get the dog over, Sing. You'll pick up the trail in the field or I am no blood-hounder. . . . Lord, what a racket that petrol-skate's making. . . . Get on, Sing."

The motor-cyclist had turned and was riding back, making the welkin ring with his back-firings.

He roared by at a good pace as Sing began to force his way through the hedge. As he passed his machine seemed to make an extra-special effort, and gave off among others a report that seemed to startle Sing Song and Corporal.

The hound yelped, and Sing Song emitted a Chinese observation that sounded wholly unprintable. He turned to the partners, raising his hand.

They saw that blood was streaming from it, and that an ugly red wound had suddenly and magically been furrowed obliquely along Corporal's back.

"What the blazes is all this?" began Mr. Bunn, grabbing at the hound.

The deep, resonant boom of a very large motor-horn raised his head. A few yards away a huge, white car—an eight cylinder, touring, seventy horse-power Krugg—was slowing to a standstill.

It was driven by a lady. Next to her sat another woman and a big chauffeur kept two bags of golf clubs company in the back.

The driver pulled up, swung open a door, and alighted.

She came round to Mr. Bunn. He recognised her at once—she was the lady whom he had last seen in a kimono through the window of the library at Harchester Hall—Miss Vandermonde. She was wearing a loose veil.

"Are you aware that the person on the motor-cycle, who has just passed you, fired a revolver either at your dog or one of you gentlemen?" she said.

Mr. Bunn pointed to the wound on Corporal's back.

"Well, we knew that something had arrived among

us—but I'll confess that we hadn't quite realised that it was a bullet."

"I saw that cyclist aim deliberately as he went by—and I saw the flash——" she broke off as her eyes fell on Sing Song's Chinese face and eyes. "A China-



"THE PERSON FIRED A REVOLVER EITHER AT YOUR DOG OR
ONE OF YOU . . ."

man!" she said in a sharp whisper of surprise—so low that only Mr. Bunn caught it.

"A Chinaman, Miss Vandermonde. But I can answer for him. He has been my personal servant for years—and has lived here for a good proportion of that time," he said quietly but significantly.

The rather startled look which had dilated the fine brown eyes of the lady faded out.

"Ah, but I only meant that he was wounded." She smiled. "Though it is a little odd to find a Chinaman out with a hound on an English countryside. And especially to witness a deliberate attempt either to murder him or to kill the hound! They have had a very narrow escape!"

She glanced down the straight road. The motor-cyclist was no more than a far-off disappearing dot.

"Too late, my dear young lady," said Mr. Bunn, guessing the thought. Few ladies of twenty-eight, or practically approximately thereabouts, more or less—to cut a long story short—are ever deeply offended at being called anybody's "dear young lady," and pleasant-looking Patricia smiled.

"Oh no. I think we could overhaul him without much trouble," she said. "And we ought to do it."

Mr. Bunn hesitated. Judging from the heavy reports of the back-firing motor-cycle it was a big, twin-cylindere, eight or nine horse-power machine; and, driven by a bold, clever rider, it could have given even the huge Krugg car a lively task on the road which, a few miles on, ran into more populous and traffic-filled roads—nearing the further outskirts of London's suburbs.

And the would-be killer was now out of sight.

Mr. Bunn had not the slightest doubt that the rider had been either Major Aldebaran Weir, or, more probably, one of his little band, and though, so far, he did not know exactly the motive behind the attempt, nevertheless, he was on the way to finding it—and other motives also. So he smiled.

"I will take care of that sportsman later on, I

promise you," he said. "It's very kind of you to offer to throw away a morning's golf like that—very generous indeed—but it isn't necessary. And if this gash hasn't put the dog out of action, we have a pressing engagement here, so to put it."

The lady eyed Corporal, and stooped to pat the ugly head.

"It is not a deep wound. He has intelligent eyes. What kind of dog is he? I don't remember seeing one of this kind before."

"Nor any one else," said Mr. Bunn, breezily. "He isn't a well-known kind. In fact, he's at least three kinds, but mainly—say fifty per cent.—bloodhound."

"Bloodhound!" She raised her eyebrows. "But—are you tracking?"

"If Corporal is still willing, we are," admitted the old adventurer.

"How thrilling! A criminal?"

But Mr. Bunn could not accommodate her with any further thrills.

"Well, hardly that. Just a gentleman who called upon us at Purdston Old Place last night and left no address."

"A burglar?"

"No."

"Just a mysterious rider—a very fine rider, I should say, Miss Vandermonde," put in Fortworth, who had finished binding Sing Song's bullet-grazed wrist.

"But—how do you know he was a fine rider?" The lady seemed suddenly interested.

"Well, he galloped in the dark in the way very

few people would gallop in the daylight. He was prepared to jump a high, spiked gate—which we chanced to have left open, luckily for him. And I've got an idea that he jumped this hedge in the moonlight."

Her gaze was oddly intent as she studied their faces.

"A very fine rider," she repeated, as one who muses. "Did you see his face?"

"Only a glimpse."

"What was he like? Do forgive my curiosity, but I have a motive for asking."

Mr. Bunn pondered.

"Oh, a youngish man, with a slight moustache—hey, Squire?"

Fortworth agreed.

"About that, yes."

Mr. Bunn noticed a sudden tinge of colour on the lady's face.

"Did you hear his voice?" she asked a shade eagerly.

"Not a sound."

She seemed disappointed.

"It is very exciting," she said, and half-turned to her car—rather reluctantly.

"If your tracking is successful, I wonder if you would care to tell me the end of your adventure," she said, with a touch of wistfulness in her voice. "I am—somehow—fascinated."

They agreed very readily to that, and were on the point of reminding her that they were calling at Harchester Hall that afternoon, when another arrival sauntered up—the hard-faced gentleman whom

Mr. Bunn had decided was a detective—now minus the ferocious cigar.

It was not without a touch of surprise that the partners observed that he appeared to be acquainted with the lady. He raised his hat very deferentially indeed as he came up.

"Good-morning, Mr. MacHarrall. You have appeared on the scene at a good moment," said the heiress. "There is a little task for you, I think."

She turned to Mr. Bunn.

"Would you like Mr. MacHarrall to help you? He is a——" she hesitated, then went on—"a very clever solver of mysteries, and—revels in puzzles. I am sure he would help you find the mysterious rider—and, perhaps, the motor-cyclist who shot at you, too."

"Eh!" Mr. MacHarrall suddenly looked intensely interested.

She laughed quietly.

"There! I told you so. Mr. MacHarrall is my assistant-secretary. I must go, now. But do all you can to help these gentlemen, please, Mr. MacHarrall."

She smiled pleasantly and returned to the car. Mr. Bunn detected a furtive grin on the lips of the chauffeur.

"You won't forget your promise, Mr. Flood," she called. "I hope to see you and Mr. Black soon—bringing a tremendous story. Good-bye!"

She waved her hand and the great car slid forward.

"Well, she certainly had our names pat enough," Mr. Bunn told himself, as he stared after the car. He transferred his gaze to Mr. MacHarrall.

"Evidently she is well served by her—assistant-secretary, huh?" he added inaudibly, and turned to the detective.

He felt a little more cordial to this one now that he had "placed him." Obviously, as he had guessed before, MacHarrall was one of the staff of camouflaged guardians with whom the great Whitney D. Vandermonde had long found it wise unobtrusively to surround his heiress. And, unless he were grievously in error, the chauffeur was another of them.

Then the fierce, hot, yellow eyes of that man of mystery, Major Aldebaran Weir, his cruel mouth, and strange Tartar-type face, came into Mr. Bunn's mind, and he nodded hearty approval of the precautions of the multi-millionaire away in distant Chicago.

"A very sensible man, far-sighted and quick-witted, I should say. I admire a man like Whitney D. Vandermonde," mused Mr. Bunn, for he was naturally a fair-minded man, and he did not allow the fact that he proposed, in due course, to relieve Mr. Vandermonde of quite a hefty hunk of his wealth—in return for services rendered—to interfere with his appreciation of the millionaire's sound common-sense.

He turned to the detective.

"Glad to have your help, Mr. MacHarrall," he said. "Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Henry Black. The young fellow with the hound is Sing Song, my valet and handy-man for the last ten years. . . . Try Corporal out on the other side of the hedge, Sing. . . . I'll tell you the facts as we go along," he added to MacHarrall. "Come on."

They followed the Chink through the hedge.

Mr. Bunn had been right. The black hound picked up the trail at once—the hoof-marks were so plain here that the little company of man-trackers could have followed them by eye alone—and headed straight across the pasture to a thick wood a couple of furlongs away.

The pace at which Corporal led them across the field gave Mr. Bunn very little opportunity for cool and collected conversation with the gentleman so abruptly injected into the little expedition. Mr. Bunn, realising that MacHarrall was by no means a man of excessively narrow mind, did not take a violent dislike to him—though it would be an exaggeration to say that he took more than a very moderate liking to him.

There was a little difficulty about the trail half-way across the field, and MacHarrall took advantage of the short pause to inquire what sort of person they expected to find at the end of the trail.

Quite truthfully, Mr. Bunn was able to explain that he had not the glimmer of an idea.

“Probably some groom who was half-drunk last night and came into our grounds by mistake,” he said, indifferently. “There’s no reason why it should be anybody else. We’ve got no enemies. Everybody in this neighbourhood has known us for years, and we’re a pretty easy-going pair, Black and I. We live and let live. But a man has got to do something—if only for the sake of his appetite. I don’t think we shall find anything exciting to-day.”

“But that revolver shot. There was no mistake about that,” MacHarrall reminded him, his hard, grey eyes intent on Mr. Bunn’s face.

"No—that's true. But it's a mystery to me, that business. The man must be mad—or mistook us for somebody else. I don't understand that at all."

A bellow from Fortworth announced that Corporal was away again, and they were about to follow when MacHarrall stopped suddenly, staring towards the distant pile that was Harchester Hall.

He screwed up his eyes.

"Say, what d'you make of the flag flying over the Hall?" he asked suddenly.

Mr. Bunn peered, shading his eyes from the sun.

"There are two flags—a Stars and Stripes, meaning that Miss Vandermonde is in residence, and a big triangular white flag underneath," he said. He had the sight of a sea-gull.

"That's how I puzzle it out, too. I guess I'll be leaving you. That white flag is a hurry call for me——" MacHarrall hesitated. "Rush of correspondence—heavy mail in from the States, shouldn't wonder. Maybe I'll drop in one night and get acquainted, Mr. Flood."

"Sure, sure," said Smiler—and forthwith Mr. MacHarrall was on his way to the Hall—straight across country as the crow flies.

"'Heavy mail' be damned for a tale," said Mr. Bunn to himself, as he stared after the hurrying detective. "There's no delivery here at this hour of the day."

He scowled a little, thinking hard.

"There's some deeper game than a straightforward kidnapping going on—devilish deep and dangerous," he muttered. "And we've got to get hold of a loose

end somewhere quick. Thought Weir's crazy eagerness to get hold of the Old Place was a loose end—but it hasn't led us anywhere yet. . . . All right, all right, damn you—I'm coming," he added, in a shout to Sing Song and Fortworth, who were beckoning him from some distance ahead. " Anyway, we'll see what's at the end of this little country stroll."

He began to trot heavily after the others. MacHarrall had already disappeared in the direction of the Hall.

CHAPTER IX

THE trail led straight along a narrow bridle-path deep into the heart of the big wood. It was little used and was very overgrown. The wood, Mr. Bunn remembered, was part of a big, shockingly neglected estate which for years had been the subject of litigation—one of those interminable family affairs which hinge on the legitimacy of some long-dead ancestor of the disputants.

It was oppressively hot and airless in the wood, and in places the trees were so thick that they shut out the sunlight.

The perspiration poured from the faces of the partners as they padded after the silent Chink and the hound. But they had not much farther to go. The trail curved sharply, swung round a dense clump of holly and ran into a little clearing, now knee-deep in growth. In the centre of this clearing stood a tiny cottage, apparently in the last stages of decay, at the point of ruin.

Thickly overgrown with a strangling mass of ivy, its rotting door stood ajar, tilting drunkenly on one hinge only. The paint had long disappeared from that door, and many tiles had slid from the roof. All the glass of the windows visible in the black cavities in the ivy was broken, and weeds grew everywhere about it. Evidently it had once been a gamekeeper's cottage, but had been long deserted.

But a thin thread of blue smoke was rising from the chimney!

Automatically Mr. Bunn noted these things in his first glance, and then the hound headed straight for a rotting, tumble-down, lean-to shed at the side of the cottage.

But half-way across the clearing he stopped with a jerk and a snarl.

Just beyond a ragged clump of growth—an ugly, untidy mixture of long grass, weeds, marigold, and a stringy, choking growth of runner beans, tenacious survivors of an old, abandoned garden—sprawled, on his back, his yellow face upturned, a Chinaman.

His sightless eyes glared up into the sun. He was quite dead.

And the cause of his death was plain to see.

In the centre of his forehead was a bullet hole, dark with half-dried blood.

For a moment the sheer surprise of the thing held them speechless.

Then Mr. Bunn recovered himself.

"Well, it's all part of this damned mystery, I suppose," he said.

He took the leash of the black hound from Sing Song, and knotted it to a stump.

"Search him, Sing, my son. Any idea who he is?"

Fortworth felt the drawn, yellow cheek and neck.

"Humph! Hasn't been dead long, anyway," he muttered, peering close at the wound. "That blood's hardly dry."

Sing Song's swift, deft hands slid back the sleeve of the dead Chinaman. He uttered a little hissing

sound, and looked up over his shoulder at his master, pointing. On the inner arm was a tattooed mark already familiar to them—the mark of the cobra with inflated hood. They had first seen that mark—the symbol of the dreaded Cobra Tong—on the arm of the unconscious Major Weir.

“Hah! One of those reptiles, is he? I thought so. We needn’t waste any more sympathy on him. Which one of them is he, Sing? Can you find his—his passport?”

Mr. Bunn meant the scrap of paper similar to that which they had found in the possession of the mysterious man with the yellow eyes. An instant later, Sing Song had it. He glanced over it and passed it to Mr. Bunn.

“This man allee same Li Shan, master,” he said, and turned again to his search.

“Whitney D. Vandermonde. . . . Patricia Charmian Vandermonde. . . .” said Mr. Bunn, poring over the only words he understood on the inscribed paper.

Fortworth gripped his arm suddenly.

“*Quiet*, man! Listen,” he said. They went rigid.

Faintly through the trees there came a clinking sound—like that made by a spade grating on stone or gravel.

Somebody, not very far away, was digging in the woods.

Mr. Bunn located the sound and leaned to Fortworth, whispering.

“The man who killed him—hey? Digging a grave. The man we’re after—the man we’re looking for!”

Fortworth’s jaw was thrust out.

"Weir?"

"No. Why should Weir kill one of his own men?" said Mr. Bunn, irritably. "The man who galloped down the drive at midnight—whose horse the Chinks killed. . . . We'll take a look at him. Come on, Sing. Leave that Chinaman till later."

He listened again. Faintly the clink of metal on stone came across to them again. The grave-digger, whoever he was, was working busily.



THEIR HANDS WENT UP.

"Somewhere a little to the right of the cottage, I make it. Go slow and take cover as you go," warned Mr. Bunn. "Come on."

They moved cautiously, obliquely, across the front of the cottage. But before they had moved half-a-dozen yards a crisp, sharp, clear, metallic voice shot through the silence of the overgrown garden:

"Stop [right there! And put up your hands! "

They turned to the cottage desperately startled.

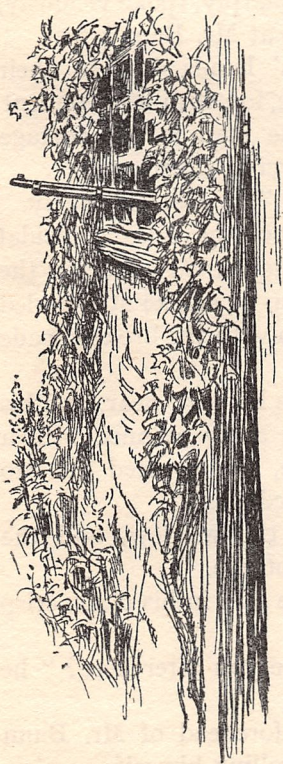
Through one of the dark, ivy-masked windows protruded the barrel of a rifle, the small, black cavity of its muzzle seeming to eye them with a chilling air of menace.

Their hands went up.

Over by the body of the dead Chinaman the black hound was growling savagely.

Then a long, low, penetrating whistle sounded from the window, behind which watched the man with the rifle, followed almost immediately by the snapping of dead twigs from the direction of the woods.

"Still! Stand still!" came the sinister warning from the cottage, and a



moment later a man appeared on the edge of the clearing—an oldish man, very tall, with a brown, seamed, weather-beaten face. In his hands he carried an old, rusty spade with a broken handle.

Even as he appeared, the black hound snapped his leash and leaped across the clearing to attack the newcomer.

The rifle muzzle swung down sharply, spoke viciously, and Corporal pitched in a heap at Mr. Bunn's feet.

Simultaneously the partners' hands flew to their pockets—but they were too late, for, with a movement almost too swift to follow, the man in the cottage ejected his spent shell and covered them again.

"Up! Up! Up with them!" he ordered swiftly.

They obeyed promptly—it would have been suicidal to have done otherwise—and they stood watching the black muzzle from which a wisp of smoke still curled lazily on the still air, as the man with the broken spade came forward.

He dropped the implement as he drew near, and his hand went to his belt, coming away at once with a heavy revolver, with which, he, too, covered the trio in the clearing, as he approached them.

The rifle disappeared from the window, and the bearer of it emerged from the cottage.

"Keep 'em covered, Jeff," he said in his clear, crisp voice, and faced Mr. Bunn.

"Who are you, and what are you after here?" he rapped out.

The veins across the broad forehead of Mr. Bunn were swollen, but he was controlling himself.

"I'll tell you that fast enough—at the right time,

my son," he replied blandly. "But I'll have to know first of all who it is I'm talking to—and why you shot that Chink."

The man with the rifle nodded.

"Well, I guess there's no conundrum about the second question," he said, his firm, good-looking face darkening. "Keep a bead on 'em, Jeff."

He stepped quickly to the crazy cottage, seemed to touch the rotting wood of the door at about the height of a man's head from the ground, and returned.

Mr. Bunn noted that he walked with the loose, easy swing of an athlete and outdoors man, and that he wore well-cut riding clothes.

"Does that convey anything to your mind—as to this other Chink?" he said. "When it was flicked at me it stuck in the door, about an inch from my face!"

He held up a tiny object.

They recognised it at once.

It was another of those evil little poisoned thorns!

"But I drilled the yellow devil through the skull before it had finished quivering!" said the man with the rifle, with an iron note of satisfaction in his voice. "And if you're in search of news I won't deny that you are well in the running for the other bullets. I kill my own snakes—and tong-men."

Mr. Bunn laughed harshly.

"Why, you damned fool, you don't imagine *we* are members of the Cobra Tong, do you?" he demanded.

The eyes of the man with the rifle darted swiftly over them—and particularly at Sing Song.

"If you aren't you can't be too quick to say just

who you are!" he said curtly. "And keep your hands up while you're doing it. I'm taking no more chances with strangers."

Mr. Bunn nodded.

"Well, that's reasonable—considering you're top-dog—temporarily top-dog. Listen, then, I'll be brief—for the sooner that dead man is underground, the better for all of us!"

"Well, get going," said the man with the rifle. "You can gamble that you're no more anxious to see that dead snake decently buried than I am."

"Sure, sure," agreed Mr. Bunn. "I've no doubt you'll be interested to know that we are the occupants of the house you were spying round last night—and you may take it that our arrival saved you from Weir and his men then. They nearly got you, anyway—whoever you are. There was a thorn in your horse's neck. Didn't you see us as you raced past down the drive?"

"You were the rubber-soled bunch with the flashlight, were you?"

"We were——"

"What are your names?"

"I am Mr. Wilton Flood; this is my friend, Mr. Henry Black, and Sing here is my valet."

The stranger nodded.

"Got any letters on you to prove that?"

"Help yourself at our pockets."

"Keep your hands up! Shoot, if they start anything, Jeff."

With a curious, fierce caution, the stranger searched Mr. Bunn and his partner, found certain letters bearing

their names and addresses, relieved them of their pistols, and nodded.

"Satisfied?" demanded Mr. Bunn. "I will answer for the Chinaman."

Rather reluctantly the other nodded.

"I guess you're what you claim," he said. "All right, Jeff. . . . But don't put your gun away."

Their arms fell.

"Hah, that's better," said Mr. Bunn. He looked at the body of Corporal at his feet, and frowned.

"You're too impulsive with that rifle, my lad," he said. "You've killed a dog I sha'n't be able to replace——"

The other laughed.

"Killed! I haven't killed the dog. He's creased—*stunned*, you'd call it. Look for yourself. Here you are—that graze along the back of his head's only skin deep. I guess I am no dog-killer! He will be all right in a few minutes."

They stared.

"D'ye mean to tell me you only aimed to graze the dog—a moving animal—in order to stun him?"

"You're right! Why not? Say, where were you raised, anyway? Haven't you ever heard of a man creasing a horse with a bullet? . . . The dog will be all right in a minute—except for a touch of soreness for a day or two."

"Well, you are certainly the best soloist on the rifle I ever remember meeting," admitted Mr. Bunn.

"But, all the same, we'd be glad to hear your name and address—and the reason why you were prowling

round Purdston Old Place last night," growled Fortworth.

"We'll let the name go at Larry Warrener—the address can stand at Ye Olde Ruin in the Wood——" he glanced significantly at the tumble-down cottage—"unless you like the sound of the Savoy Hotel better; and the reason why I was prowling around your place last night is the same reason as why, if necessary, I'd be prowling around Canterbury Cathedral or Windsor Castle—namely, for the protection of Miss Patricia Vandermonde."

His keen, grey eyes searched them.

"Is that reason enough for you?"

Mr. Bunn laughed quietly.

"Surely—surely. . . . And your friend?"

"My friend is Jeff Croucher—and let me tell you that a man in need of a friend has got the lid of his luck well padlocked when he can say Jeff is his friend."

"And—to cut a long story short—you are acting against the Cobra Tong on behalf of Miss Vandermonde?"

"Yes, you can say that—though she doesn't know it."

"Well, so are we," Mr. Bunn assured him. "But we can go into all that later. The thing to do now is to bury that cobra-man over there. Before lunch-time, if possible. I'm hungry—and this is not a country for leaving dead tong-men lying about. . . . Take off his boots, Sing. If old Corporal is willing before the trail's cold, we'll see where Li Shan started from. . . . You and Jeff had better come and lunch with us, Mr. Warrener—after the ceremony."

The good-looking young American stared at him coolly. "Say, Mr. Flood, were you a General in the Great War?" he asked. "You've got the habit of command pretty well ingrown, haven't you?"

But Mr. Bunn only laughed.

"That'll be all right, Mr. Warrener," he said, blandly. "There's more than twenty years' experience dividing us—and I'm not a stranger in this country. Listen to the old man for once, for when it comes to leading he's the kindly light—and as a general rule, not easy to extinguish."

He dropped into a graver tone.

"It's going to take all of us—and all the brains and experience we can muster up—to keep Miss Vandermonde safe, my boy. I've only got hold of a loose end or so, yet—but they look like leading to something ugly. Hey? How about it? Do we work together, or in separate parties?"

For a few seconds they studied each other—the one, young, strong, confident, competent, unshackled by any fear, and not entirely without experience himself; the other, big, elderly, a little ungainly, heavy-looking, but with a curious, indefinable look at the back of his hard eyes which hinted quietly that, in spite of his appearance and manner, here was a man whose partnership in an affair of moment was not to be lightly declined.

Warrener saw that—and so, to judge by the slight relaxation of his gaunt features, did Mr. Jeff Croucher, a fine-looking old Westerner, who obviously would be far more at home on a big ranch than anywhere else on earth.

They exchanged a glance. Evidently they thought alike for both moved their heads slightly in an oblique, scarcely perceptible movement.

"Well, that's put fairly enough," said Warrenner. "I'll say that. And I don't see why it shouldn't be true. But we come from a place where men get in the habit of relying on themselves and don't tear up the roads racing to make partnerships with strangers. And for the present, I guess we'll leave the treaty unsigned. We understand each other pretty well, and, if necessary, we can sign up an alliance at any old time. Meantime, we'll carry on in separate groups—as we're going. I guess that needn't hurt anybody's feelings."

"That goes with us," agreed Mr. Bunn. "You're our reinforcements—we're yours! Let it stand at that. . . . Well, we'd better get busy. Sing, you see to the hound. We four will attend to the Chinese snake."

Within half-an-hour they had buried Li Shan and, effectively concealed the grave with strewn pine needles. When, presently, they came back to the cottage there was no sign that here, deep in the still heart of the ancient, English wood, was the last resting-place of a Chinese criminal.

Li Shan might be missed—but there was none who would ever dream of looking for him here.

Nor—considering that thorn plucked from the door—did any of them feel any regret. The man had stolen through the woods like a venomous yellow serpent, to spy—and he had tried to kill. He had received only that which, with his last action, he had tried to inflict.

Only his boots remained above ground—and these were in the safe care of his countryman, Sing Song, who would see to it that these told no tales.

Corporal was on his legs again, but the old hound had had his full share of what Mr. Bunn truly described as “the rough stuff” during the last twenty-four hours.

“He’s got the heart of a large lion,” explained his owner, defensively, “but he’s been knocked senseless once and been shot twice since midnight, and I don’t blame him for showing no anxiety to track that Chink before he’s ready.”

“It’s a pity I creased him—but if I had let him alone, Jeff would certainly have brained him,” said Larry Warrener. “But it jars on me to think that he could lead us straight to where that Chink came from.”

Mr. Bunn agreed absently—another thought had returned to him.

“Have you got any idea why that yellow-eyed wolf, Weir, was hanging around our place?” he asked. “He tried to buy it from us first of all—at a fancy price. You didn’t overhear ’em talking at all?”

Warrener looked surprised.

“Only for the passage—that’s all they need it for. They’ve got no interest in the house except for the passage,” he said.

The partners stared.

“The passage—what passage?”

“Why, the underground passage to Harchester Hall!” . . . The underground passage from your house to Harchester Hall,” repeated the American, his

quick eyes flitting from one to the other of the amazed partners.

He noted their astonishment.

"Say, do you mean to tell me that you never knew there was a subterranean passage from your own house to Harchester Hall—you, who've lived in it for all these years!"

He turned to the silent, grim-looking Jeff Croucher.

"Can you beat it, Jeff? I know this is a country where you can find rare old panelling worth more than its weight in gold pasted over and covered up with a cheap, floral-printed paper worth two cents an acre; but I certainly thought every man knew his own secret tunnels!"

"Oh, that old rumour!" said Mr. Bunn carelessly, concealing his amazement. "I thought for a moment that you meant a real passage, in working order. The old, historical tunnel that the guide-books talk about partly fell in and was partly filled in and blocked up in the days of James I. You can see the depression in the park at Harchester Hall, where the roof of the tunnel fell in—see it to this day. All grass-grown, of course. If that's all these tong-men want the place for, I wish I'd sold it to 'em. They'd want a squad of navvies working there for a couple of years before ever they got into Harchester Hall from Purdston Old Place!"

"Well, they don't know that, anyway, for I overheard 'em talking about it just before they entered your house, and to hear the leader of the bunch—the man you call Weir, that would be—you'd think the passage was in perfect working order. In fact, I was on the

point of warning Miss Vandermonde. If that Chink hadn't come along, Jeff would have been on his way with this note."

Warrener took a note from his pocket.

"No use to make a fool of myself now, anyway," he said quietly, and tore the note up. Mr. Bunn was watching him very closely.

"But why didn't you call on her and warn her?" he asked casually, opening his cigar-case as he spoke.

"Miss Vandermonde and I are not on visiting terms," said Warrener, a sudden flush on his brown, clean-cut face, and a chill, hard note in his voice, which clearly was intended to warn Mr. Bunn that it would be wise not to pursue this aspect of the matter.

But the astute old rascal had no desire to do so. One way and another he was getting information freely offered him which—like Larry's panelling—was worth its weight in gold.

"Well, well it's just as well we saved you from sending that note. No man likes to be made to look foolish. And to get a letter back reading 'Miss Vandermonde presents her compliments to Mr. Warrener, thanks him for his timely warning, and will take the necessary steps to prevent any entry into her house by means of an underground passage which was filled up some hundreds of years ago!' would be very annoying."

"Take a cigar, Larry, my friend. You, too. Jeff. They're good cigars. And, remember, Purdston Old Place is at your disposal any time. And now we'll be moving. Plenty to do. Shall expect to see you two any time you feel like a change."

Mr. Bunn nodded genially, and turned to Sing Song.

"How's Corporal, my lad?"

The Chink grinned.

"Him velly well for walkee home—no likee workee. Allee same sulky, master."

"All right. We'll try out the trail to-morrow. If he won't work now, he won't. You can lead a bloodhound to the trail, but you can't make him smell it. Should feel sulky myself if I'd collected what he's collected in the last twenty-four hours," admitted Mr. Bunn.

CHAPTER X

It was rather a silent return journey which they made to Purdston Old Place.

But as they approached their house, the senior partner emerged from his reveries and studied the place with a new interest.

"I don't know how Weir learned about that secret passage. Anyway, we've got to find it. I think I managed to persuade Warrener that it doesn't exist, but I hope he never looks up any guide-books—or hunts for that depression in the park. I tell you, Squire, it called for some quick thinking to tear off that bit of fancy history at short notice. . . . Yes, we've got to find that passage. It'll be an interesting little job for you and Sing Song this afternoon."

"And what about yourself?" demanded Fortworth warmly.

"I shall be thereabouts. But I'm due to put in a lot of solid thinking after lunch—and I can't concentrate my mind on more than half-a-dozen things at once," explained Mr. Bunn good-humouredly, as they entered the house.

"The trouble is," he declared over lunch, "that my great gift for noticing details is liable to get snowed under in an affair like this. There are too many of 'em flying round."

He drained his wineglass and refilled it.

"I wish I could pass some of the brainwork on to you," he said wistfully. "But what would be the use?"

Fortworth glared—debarred from making a prompt retort by the rather generous mouthful of *entrecôte à la Mirabeau* which he was manipulating.

"However, thank God you and Sing are about the two most reliable bear-cats for action any man could ask for."

Slightly mollified at this *amende*, Fortworth remarked :

"Can't say I see any sense in any of the things that have been happening," he declared.

Mr. Bunn chuckled.

"Nor I, nor I—until our little interview with Larry and his silent pal with the eyes, Jeff. A couple of good men, those, Squire. Handicapped by being strange to this country—but sound men, very."

He glanced at the clock.

"There's not a lot of time to spare, but I'll give you my idea of the business so far. The way I worry it out is like this : We know that Weir and his gang are meaning to kidnap Patricia Vandermonde. Revenge, maybe—or as a lever for use against Whitney Vandermonde. We shall see when Tony cables. In some way Little Yellow-Eyes learns of this passage way, and I'll own it must have looked well to him. What could be better than to buy this house, get installed, and stroll at night—by the underground route—to Harchester Hall, and get the general lie of the land there. Then, presently, when all is ready, all he need do is to go and fetch Patricia—a whiff of chloroform

in her sleep and everything silent and sure. In the morning, Whitney Vandermonde's heiress would be missing without a sign or a clue. And Weir has got her where he wants her—in spite of the detectives her uncle has surrounded her with."

"Humph! And where does Warrener fit in?"

Mr. Bunn smiled.

"Larry's in love with her—and I shouldn't care to swear that she ain't interested in him. But there's been trouble between 'em. They aren't on visiting terms. My guess is that he followed her to England, partly on the chance of making up, and partly in order to take care of her. . . . The real start of this business was in America, unless I'm mistaken! Remember how both of them suspected Sing Song. Because he was a Chinaman. They've got some reason to look pretty old-fashioned at strange Chinamen.

"Probably that's why Warrener first got wise to Weir—must have seen him with his Chinks—for, make no mistake, they're not far off. They've got a burrow round about here somewhere. Riding around at night, eyeing the light in Patricia's window (as lovers do, so I understand, though what satisfaction they get out of it, I don't know) he sees Yellow Eyes and his heathen friends slide in here—and follows 'em. They know he's an enemy of theirs, and Weir sends a scout—this Li Shan—out to see what he's up to—and where he lives. The scout gets what is coming to him—not being scout enough for a rifle-conjurer like Warrener, or a tough old plainsman like Jeff."

"Hah! What about that burglar we chased across the Park?"

"I have a tenner to spare on a wager that that burglar was one of the detectives looking around—MacHarrall, for choice," said Mr. Bunn comfortably.

"All right. But who were the two men and the woman that made the midnight call?"

Mr. Bunn's face grew serious.

"That's where my guessing stops short," he said slowly. "I don't know—and it's too early to guess. But I don't like 'em at all. I can't fit 'em in. I don't even know whether they're working with Weir or not. . . . That's what I'm hoping to find out from this secretarial sportsman, Scanlon, at the Hall this afternoon."

He fidgeted and revisited his wineglass.

"That was a fine girl we had a glimpse of. A pleasant, capable, shapely girl—not spoiled. But if you can put me wise to some way of asking her why a girl like herself thinks it's necessary to exhibit her hosiery to her secretary, and to allow him to give his celebrated imitation of a slave-buyer studying a slave he thinks of buying—and that at midnight in the presence of two other callers—you'd save me a lot of hard thinking, Squire."

Fortworth nodded.

"It's an awkward question to put to a high-spirited girl," he admitted.

"It is—and I'm the goat that's got to do it, somehow," said Mr. Bunn, without enthusiasm.

"She'll have you fired out of the Hall," said Fortworth, with a touch of pleasant anticipation in his voice.

But Mr. Bunn shook his head.

"Not if I ask her diplomatically," he demurred. "And I'm not asking her at the Hall, anyway."

"Where, then?" demanded Fortworth.

Mr. Bunn rose.

"On the golf-links. I'm running over there now. It'll look more natural. She will see me there—I'll take care of that—and probably she'll want to learn what happened this morning. That will be opening enough for me. . . . If you and Sing find that passage while I'm gone I'll be a lot easier in my mind when we call on this fellow Scanlon."

He turned to Sing Song.

"Get the car round, Sing," he commanded, "just about as quick as you can. I don't want to have to cut a good lunch in half for nothing!"

Sing disappeared promptly.

But Mr. Bunn was spared the task of putting to Miss Vandermonde the somewhat intimate questions which he had outlined to his partner.

He drove himself over to the golf-links, where he saw no sign of the big Krugg, which he knew the fair Patricia was using that day. He frowned a little, and drifted into the professional's shop—in preference to making inquiries at the club-house. The pro and his assistant were talking as he entered.

. . . "Carelessness," the pro was saying. "It's gettin' awful, this carelessness. It's the meeraculous influx o' leddies on to the gowf courses during the past few years. In the old days at St. Andra's, ye ken, laddie, there was no such carelessness. . . . These days they stand in the line o' each ither's ba' wi' the utmost carelessness. A leddy slices a shot and—ye

have an accident on ye're honds forthwith. It's bad—bad for business. D'ye see, laddie? Miss Vandermonde will spend no money in the shop for a month, and mebbe twa. That's bad!”

“Hey, Sandy, what's that—Miss Vandermonde had an accident?” asked Mr. Bunn, very casually indeed, bending over a new club he had taken from a stand.

The pro—with a slight tone of personal grievance—informed him that only that morning, at the ninth hole, Miss Vandermonde had, rather carelessly, moved on before the lady she was playing with had taken her second shot. The latter, playing a full brassy shot, had sliced—very badly, and the ball had struck Miss Vandermonde in the mouth. Fortunately, Miss Vandermonde chanced to have her finger tips to her lips at the moment of impact, so that she had probably escaped disfigurement. But several teeth had been loosened, both lips cut, and a finger, possibly two, broken.

She had motored home at once—a boy had run in with instructions for the chauffeur to go round to the road bordering the ninth hole and fetch her.

Mr. Bunn listened attentively.

“Hum! That's bad—very bad indeed. She is a charming young lady. I'm sorry to hear this—very sorry. At the ninth hole, hey? Sent one of the caddies in for the car, you say?”

“No, sir——” spoke up the pro's assistant. “Some village boy—not a caddie. The ladies were playing without caddies. Her lady friend said caddies made her nervous.”

“Hum! I can understand that! Some of the

caddies here would make anybody nervous. . . . It's bad—very bad," said Mr. Bunn thoughtfully, replacing the club. "It's put me off golf to-day. I'll try the club later."

He moved out of the shop, and without troubling to enter the club-house, strolled across the links to the ninth hole.

There were few players out and none anywhere near the ninth. The old adventurer ambled slowly from tee to green, apparently musing.

"Queer, they should have been playing without caddies . . ." he told himself. "Must have wanted to gossip privately as they played, hey?"

He stood at the edge of the green, looking about him. He frowned a little as his eyes fell on the chimneys of a house beyond the lonely road which ran past the ninth hole. This house was almost hidden by a low hillock crowned with pine trees, and was, perhaps, three hundred yards away from the green.

Mr. Bunn's frown deepened as he stared at the chimneys.

"Hum . . . broken fingers, hey? Great pity!"

He moved on to the road. It was a low-lying track, not too well kept, and softer at the sides than the dusty main roads.

"She sent for her chauffeur to fetch her at once . . . hum. Very natural."

A white object, a little way along the road, caught his attention. He moved along. It was a lady's handkerchief, white and clean, marked P. C. V.

Mr. Bunn's lips tightened. He put the handkerchief away and, without moving, continued to study

the road and the rather complicated pattern of the motor-tyre tracks visible there. Evidently the Krugg driver had come up, turned—having had to engage his reverse gear twice to turn the long car in the narrow space—and raced off the way he had come. Mr. Bunn recognised the huge seven-inch steel-studded tyres of the Krugg, noted the tortuous course of those tyre tracks to his own satisfaction, and concentrated on the other tracks shown on the road. There were very few, for it was a by-road, little used by motor-traffic. One set of three-ridged Palmer cords he recognised without difficulty as belonging to the car of the occupant of the house further along—the country resort of a rising young Harley Street doctor, who spent as much time as he could near Purdston Links.

He even went to the trouble of making a rough sketch. He could identify easily the marks of the car belonging to Miss Vandermonde and to the doctor, but he considered the tracks of an unknown car for a long while.

With a final glance round he strolled down the road towards the house.

"Well I'm damned," he repeated to himself, over and over again as he went. "If . . . I wonder . . ."

Opposite the house of the Harley Street golfer he studied the road again, desisting as the owner of the place came into view, strolling with a cigar round the garden.

Mr. Bunn nodded.

"Not playing to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Had an early round this morning. Going out again later."

"Hah, good work. Be careful at the ninth."

The other stared.

"Why the ninth?"

"Easy to have an accident there," laughed Mr. Bunn. But the doctor did not appear to catch the allusion.

"Oh, I don't know. What about the fifth? There are worse traps at the fifth, don't you think? That cross bunker there is a brute, if you like."

Mr. Bunn nodded.

"Well, maybe, maybe," he agreed. "Yes, I agree with you there. The fifth ain't golf—it's inhumanity! Hey? Ha, ha—inhumanity!"

He moved on, chuckling at his joke. For a few yards he went in a leisurely manner, but as soon as he set the trees between him and the house, he speeded up extraordinarily, hurrying back to his car.

Once he stopped to mop his forehead—using superheated language as he did so.

"The cunning, crafty devils!" he said, with other details concerning the said "devils," then pressed on.

CHAPTER XI

A QUARTER-OF-AN-HOUR later he strode into Purdston Old Place, heading straight to the sideboard—where he found Fortworth, excessively dirty and grimy, helping himself to a perfectly enormous whisky-and-soda.

"Back already, are you?" said that individual with unusual good humour. "But you don't steal a march on us this time!"

He half emptied his glass.

"Located it in next to no time. In a corner of the cellar, behind the big wine-bin," continued Fortworth. "And a devilish dark, damp-looking hole it is."

His tone was airy—like that of a man who has done a difficult thing with unexpected ease.

"What d'ye mean, Squire? What have you found?" asked Mr. Bunn, absently and without much interest, as he shot a spray of soda into his whisky.

Fortworth stared.

"Found! What have we found?" he said irritably. "Why, the thing you left us to find! D'ye mean to say you've forgotten it already. Damn it, man, look at the filthy state I'm in! It's been no joke, let me tell you—we've found the entrance to the underground passage to Harchester Hall!"

Mr. Bunn nodded without excitement.

"Oh, have you? What time did you find it?"

"About ten minutes ago," Fortworth informed him sourly.

"Ten minutes ago, did you?" said Mr. Bunn. "Well, you were about a couple of hours too late—at least. They've got her!"

"What's that?"

Mr. Bunn turned on his partner, his face set and hard, his eyes like green flint.

"I tell you they've got her! Plain English, ain't it? These Cobra men have kidnapped Miss Vandermonde and are miles away with her!"

Fortworth stared, then laughed.

"Ah, well, there you're wrong for once," he said, with laborious irony. "You might be labouring under the impression that Little Yellow Eyes and his surviving assistants have got the lady, but if so you are labouring under a delusion. I am the lad that can give you the latest information about Miss Patricia. I know where she is—and why she is where she is."

"You do. Well, perhaps you've got no objection to telling me where she is and why," suggested Mr. Bunn.

"I haven't," said Fortworth, with extreme cheerfulness. "The fact is, the lady is in bed—bless her."

"Ah, is she now—in bed, bless her, hey?" purred Mr. Bunn.

"She is—and the reason she is in bed is because Miss Anita Welland—a friend, visiting Patricia—accidentally drove a golf ball into her face on the links an hour or two ago, poor little soul."

Mr. Bunn feigned surprise.

"Is that so?" he inquired.

"It is so," Fortworth assured him. "I heard it some time ago. The poor child has had all her front teeth smashed, both lips cut to pieces, three fingers smashed, and was brought home from the golf-links, practically unconscious. She is disfigured for life!" he concluded, with a queer blend of triumph over his partner and genuine sympathy for Miss Vandermonde in his voice.

Mr. Bunn finished his whisky-and-soda.

"It's a very remarkable thing to my mind how these things grow as they get passed on," he mused aloud. "By the time the news gets a little further afield Patricia will be suffering from compound fracture of the skull and concussion of the soul. She will be toothless, hairless, and practically mouthless. . . . Exaggeration. An heiress can't be disfigured anyway—she will always be beautiful in someone's eyes. . . . Listen to me, Squire, and I'll get your news up to date!"

"Now I'll tell you what's happened," said Mr. Bunn, and lit a cigar with maddening deliberation.

"Here are the facts," he said at last. "I was told by the professional at the links that this accident had happened. At the ninth hole, he said. They told me the ladies had no caddies with them—and that a village boy, who had happened to appear near the ninth green, had been sent by Miss Welland to fetch Patricia's chauffeur. . . . Now, probably you—or any other average man—would have swallowed that. But I am a little more fastidious about what I swallow. And I decided to stroll across and take a look at the place of

the accident. I was looking for a few details, and being, as I am, a detail expert, both trained and naturally, I found 'em."

He puffed gently at his cigar and produced his sketches.

"Try to follow me carefully, Squire," he said. "I thought it improbable that Miss Vandermonde would lug her own clubs around with her on a warmish day like this, unless she had some special reason—which I gathered was because caddies (the little hounds!) made Miss Welland nervous. (I understand that, scorch their young hides—they nearly make me nervous.) Still, the point interested me—by instinct. Neither of the ladies in the car this morning looked nervous to any extent. . . . I bore it in mind as I went across the course."

"You bore it in mind, yes—go on," interjected his partner acidly.

"There's a by-road running past the ninth green as you know. I picked up this there."

He spread out the pretty, white handkerchief marked P. C. V. before his partner.

"What do you make of that, Squire?"

Fortworth frowned over it.

"Huh, let's look. P. C. V.—Patricia Charmian Vandermonde. Evidently the girl dropped her handkerchief. That's what I make of that. What else is there to make of it?"

Mr. Bunn nodded, smiling blandly.

"It's clean," he said, "there's no blood on it. She was only on the ninth green once to-day and she dropped her handkerchief in the road *beyond* the green."

She reached the green with her lips bleeding and probably her fingers—but there's no blood on her handkerchief! Queer that, hey, Squire? She must have needed several handkerchiefs if she was hurt badly. Yet she hasn't touched her lips with her own. Not like a wounded woman, that, hey?"

Fortworth stared like a man smitten with an idea and opened his lips.

"Keep quiet—it's my turn," warned Mr. Bunn.

"Who lives in that pretty new house about three hundred yards along the road from the ninth green?" demanded Mr. Bunn.

Fortworth thought.

"That Harley Street sportsman who wears scarlet tassels on his golf stockings—Doctor—Doctor Cavan-der. Good-looking guy, plays a good game of golf—like a lot of other doctors!"

"Correct," said Mr. Bunn.

"I suppose you're going to tell me what I've thought of already—even with my feeble brain," snapped Fortworth. "You're going to tell me Patricia hurried off to him for attention."

But Mr. Bunn smiled—a sparse and stingy smile.

"I'm going to tell you that she *didn't*," he said. "It's exactly what she or any other sensible woman like her would have done. Cavan-der is clever, almost famous, he was right on the spot, he's young and extremely good-looking. Why, his looks and manners would be an excuse for an unhurt lady to visit him for treatment—and a girl in pain wouldn't dream of passing his place to travel a couple of miles and then to wait for another doctor to be sent for!"

"And yet Miss Vandermonde didn't stop at his place, you say?"

"She did not!"

"How d'you know?" asked Fortworth incredulously.

"The doctor had not *heard* of the accident when I passed his place—long after Miss Vandermonde. I questioned him—near enough to make sure. If she had called there—as any sane woman would have done—he'd have known of it, wouldn't he?"

Mr. Bunn thrust his sketch under his interested partner's eyes.

"Motor tracks!" he said briefly. "No. 1 is from a seven-inch steel-studded tyre—on Miss Vandermonde's big Krugg car."

Fortworth nodded.

"Saw it this morning," he agreed.

"No. 2 is from Dr. Cavander's Palmer cords on his light Torpillette runabout."

"Yes. I'll grant you that."

"Numbers 3 and 4 next. What do they convey to you?"

Fortworth scowled.

"I've seen 'em before and recently. A diamond-pattern on an off wheel and a bar circle on the near wheel of the same car—why, it was——"

"On the car that brought those midnight visitors to Harchester Hall last night, hey?" demanded Mr. Bunn, excitedly.

"It was," agreed Fortworth.

"Sure. Trust the old man. Now look at this sketch again."

"I'll explain this—for I am not a Royal Academy sharp and no man but me—the man who drew it—could understand it. Look now, for it's a bit of good detective work. No. 1—steel-studs—the Krugg—came up to the ninth green, stopped, reversed twice, turned and went straight back down the road, *not* stopping at Cavander's. No. 2 means nothing. It's a straight forward track from and to Cavander's house.

"The car with tyres Nos. 3 and 4 came to the ninth green from an opposite direction to the Krugg, stopped, reversed once, turned and went back the way it had come! I found the handkerchief where it had stopped."

Mr. Bunn paused, looking expectantly at his partner.

"Do you get the answer to the riddle?" he asked.

Fortworth shook his head.

"All right. I'll put you wise. Patricia Vandermonde is supposed to have been wounded, but her handkerchief is spotless, and she ignored the doctor on the spot. She was *not* wounded or hurt, Squire. And there were no caddies to witness it—thanks to Miss Welland's special request. No witnesses—remember that."

"But the Krugg came up and took her home because she *was* wounded—the tracks prove that," demurred Fortworth. "And Bloom saw her go by—with her face bound up! I had the news from Bloom! You can't get over that."

"Can't I?" said Mr. Bunn. "Let me give you my guess at what happened. On the ninth green Miss Vandermonde was trapped, or lured, or forced, into the strange car (with No. 3 and 4 tyres), and taken away—

kidnapped, you can call it. Miss Welland was in the plot against her—and had refused to have caddies because they would have spoiled the trick. Once the kidnappers have gone with Miss Vandermonde, who may have dropped her handkerchief by accident, or on purpose, Miss Welland sends a boy to the club-house for the Krugg car, which hurried to the spot and takes the ladies back to Harchester Hall. They don't stop at the doctor's because there's no wound to stop for!"

"The ladies?" asked Fortworth blankly.

"Miss Welland and the lady with her face partly bound up——"

"Miss Vandermonde?"

"No, damn it—the woman the kidnappers brought in the car to impersonate her! *Now*, d'you see? The woman in bed now at Harchester Hall is not Miss Vandermonde, but the woman who was substituted for her at the ninth green! Got it, Squire? Miss Welland took out to that green Miss Vandermonde—but she brought back to Harchester Hall another woman!" Mr. Bunn's voice suddenly went harsh with excitement.

Fortworth nodded.

"You're right! . . . But why the wound—and the broken fingers?"

Mr. Bunn drove his fist down on to the table with a blow that made the glasses jump.

"Because the fake Miss Vandermonde's lips aren't quite the same shape as the real Miss Vandermonde's and she wants to hide them for a while!" he roared. "And because she doesn't write quite the same, and wants an excuse not to write for a while! Hey?"

Fortworth was really impressed.

"I'll admit it—I've got to hand it to you. You've hit the target in the dead centre!" he confessed, and excitedly dashed himself off an out-size noggin of Scotch-and-soda to prove it.

"What next?"

Mr. Bunn glanced at the clock.

"Now we interview Arnold Scanlon, Esq.—by appointment!" he said. "Have you locked the cellar door? We don't want the Blooms prowling about that tunnel."

Fortworth nodded, passing him the key.

"Good. Where's Sing Song?"

"Planning out his ideas for dinner to-night."

"Very good! You're getting the knack of organisation, after all, Squire! We'll be moving, then!"

He led the way out to the waiting car.

"There's only one thing I don't quite understand. The car Weir and his men came to our place in had totally different tyres from the one that went to Harchester Hall last night—and to the ninth green to-day. That's got a queer look to me."

He got into the car, frowning.

"They may have changed cars," suggested his partner.

"They may—but it was a quickish change. However—we'll see!"

Mr. Bunn engaged his gear, let in his clutch and they headed for Harchester Hall.

CHAPTER XII

WHATEVER may have been Mr. Arnold Scanlon's private opinion of the partners' midnight "reconnoitre," he had evidently left strict instructions that they were to be received as highly honoured visitors—if the manner of the manservant, who conducted them to the library, was anything to go by.

Scanlon welcomed them with extreme cordiality.

Miss Vandermonde's chief secretary was one of those clean-shaven, sharp-looking young-old, semi-legal, semi-political looking individuals. He had a broad and bulbous brow, thin lips, a wide, hard mouth. His manner was charming, but to the experienced Mr. Bunn he was not actor enough to be able to conceal the natural insincerity of his smile, or the calculating expression of his hard, grey eyes.

He was at a disadvantage with Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth. He was sharp—but he looked it, whereas the partners looked heavy-headed, dull and slow.

"Good-day, gentlemen," he said, fussing comfortable chairs a few inches out of their position and back again, in a polite sort of way. "Be seated. It is most kind of you to call. My little inquiry surprised you, perhaps? Not serious, fortunately, but you will understand readily enough that Mr. Whitney Vandermonde looks for—very reasonably, of course—a considerable degree of real care from those of us to whom he has

given the privilege of serving his niece. The heiress of one of the richest men in the United States, as no doubt you know, gentlemen."

He smiled, watching them.

Mr. Bunn laughed.

"Certainly, certainly," he said. "And when you saw footsteps all over the place this morning, you naturally had them tracked back to where they came from—and requested the owners—us—to explain. Well, that's very right and natural—as it should be, in fact. Should do the same myself, certainly, hey, Squire?"

"Surely so, surely so," said the squire.

"The reason we came is soon explained, and I'll do it," continued Mr. Bunn. "Last night—after midnight—some burglar tried to break into our little place across the park. He failed. We heard him and chased him. He headed for this place. He must have thought he had thrown us off, for when we arrived here we found him peering in through a window—probably planning to break in as soon as the person in the room had gone to bed."

"This room? I was sitting up late last night."

"Yes—probably it was this room," agreed Mr. Bunn. He leaned forward.

"Now, Mr. Scanlon, I may tell you that I am a man who has a horror of burglars, and a stubborn hatred of dishonesty, or sharp practice in any shape or form. I am not ashamed to say that I am a stubborn and bigoted respecter of Property. Property! The nation that loses its respect for Property is doomed, Mr. Scanlon. I am a plain man, and I maintain that the

famous John Bunyan (or, maybe, it was Dickens) never made a greater mistake than when he wrote that stuff about 'who steals my purse steals trash.' A ruinous, bad-principled thing to write, Mr. Scanlon. Who steals my purse steals my Property—and there is no excuse for him. He's *low*, sir! Never mind that, now, however. I decided to take that burglar red-handed. So I placed my friend down the drive to cut him off—and my servant and the dog under the tree to nab him as he went by—if I missed him myself. Then I closed in on him. He was too quick. He heard me closing in, and though I grabbed him—on the flower-bed outside the window—he got away.

"My man missed him, but my friend, Mr. Black, here caught him on the turf, half-way down the drive. There was a struggle. The thief was armed with knuckle-dusters and used them—notice Mr. Black's cheek and eye. He floored Black, and got away down the drive. He must have had a motor and some friends waiting for him—these modern crooks are sharp men—for, long before we could get to the end of the drive we saw the car-lights switched on, heard it start up and disappear. We had lost the man. So we returned to where my friend Black was lying, picked him up, staunched his cut cheek, and went home. We hesitated as to whether we should inform the inmates of the place, but by the time we were ready, the lights were out, and the place was in darkness. In any case, whether we had received your letter or not, we should have called to-day about it."

Mr. Bunn ceased, selected a good-looking cigar from a box on the table and lit it.

For some moments Mr. Arnold Scanlon sat silent, evidently thinking hard.

But his face had lightened curiously. He looked—relieved.

“That was very neighbourly, gentlemen—most neighbourly. Miss Vandermonde will be grateful.”

It was evident that he believed the story and, moreover, that the whole business of the chase had occurred after his mysterious visitors had left. But he made quite sure.

“Let me see,” he mused. “About the motor—you say that the thief ran down the drive to the car which was waiting for him. Did you see the car?”

“No. We heard it only.”

“You were too late? Did you see any of the man’s confederates—the men in the car?”

“No. Were there any?” asked Mr. Bunn.

“Several, I believe—judging from the gardener’s report about the tracks.”

“Hum! just as well we scared them off,” said Mr. Bunn.

“Yes, indeed.”

Scanlon’s relief was plain.

“Well, we owe you a debt of gratitude, gentlemen,” he began.

“No, no,” protested Mr. Bunn. “We were doing it on principle—should have done the same for anyone.”

He chuckled.

“It will make an interesting story to tell Miss Vandermonde presently over the tea-cups. I will make it more thrilling—just to amuse her. Ladies like a thrill.”

Scanlon looked at him rather queerly.

"Over the tea-cups—I don't quite follow," he said.

"Presently—at tea-time, I mean. I'll tell the story of the little excitement all over again. It will amuse her," explained Mr. Bunn

A genuine surprise flashed into Scanlon's eyes.

"Er—do I understand that you know Miss Vandermonde—that—er—she wanted you to—er—take tea here to-day?" he asked as delicately as he could.

"Hey? Certainly. We had quite a chat with her this morning, on her way to golf. We promised to call, then."

"But, my dear sir, Miss Vandermonde since then has had a serious accident on the golf-links. Have you not heard? Indeed, the doctor has not long left. She is in bed. Very shaken and ill——"

He broke off abruptly as a lady entered.

The partners recognised her at once. It was Miss Welland, who had been in the car with the heiress that morning, and who had played golf with her.

She was a striking, distinctly handsome brunette, perhaps twenty-five years old.

She bowed rather distantly to the partners.

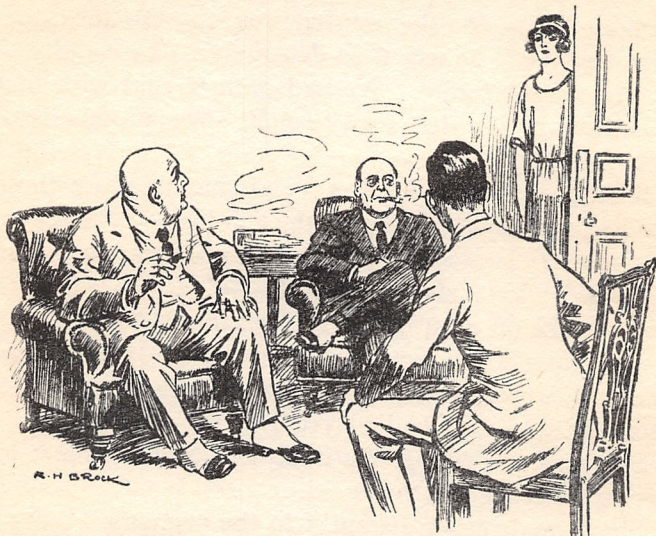
"Forgive me if I interrupt," she said in a clear, rather cold and imperative voice, and turned to the smooth secretary. "Miss Vandermonde is seriously annoyed with her French maid, Julie. The girl has been careless, unsympathetic and impudent. Miss Vandermonde desires you to discharge her, pay her, and send her away at once."

"I will attend to it immediately," said Scanlon and

rose, as the chilly beauty went out without taking any further notice of the partners.

They took the hint. There was nothing else to do. Whatever Mr. Bunn's theories may have been about the accident it was evident that "tea" with the heiress was out of the question.

So they left after a few civilities with Scanlon.



"MISS VANDERMONDE DESIRES YOU TO DISCHARGE HER . . ."

"Hard luck," growled Fortworth, not without a touch of malice as they went down the drive, glancing at his partner. But Mr. Bunn's hard, green eyes were blazing with an unusual excitement and triumph.

"Hard luck be damned, Squire!" he said in a low, harsh voice. "I've got the missing link I wanted.

I tell you, I'm wise to the whole game. Hey? That black-haired icy dame handed me the very bit of the jigsaw I wanted! Come on—we've got plenty to do."

He slowed up at the entrance to avoid a big brand-new two-seater Vauxhall standing across the gate.

MacHarrall, the detective, was talking to the driver of this car.

"I'm telling you, man, it's no use to-day," they heard him say, "Miss Vandermonde's ill in bed. Come again in a few days' time. There's nothing doing to-day, y'understand!"

The driver of the new Vauxhall looked up as Mr. Bunn, apparently intending to speak to MacHarrall, brought his car to a standstill.

And then they both got a shock.

It was the man with the yellow eyes. He had shaved off the long moustache, but there was no mistaking his fierce, glaring eyes.

Without a shadow of doubt, this man was Major Aldebaran Weir, of the Secret Society known as the Cobra Tong—who was at that moment supposed to be miles away in quite another car with the kidnapped heiress!

Fortworth gasped in his surprise. But a second later he turned, with greater amazement, to Mr. Bunn—for that old rascal was chuckling like one who has just received good news!

CHAPTER XIII

FORTWORTH half rose, his eyes on the man Weir, with the evident intention of "dealing with" him, but he yielded to a low, fierce whisper from his partner, and the urgent clutch of a heavy hand, dragging him down to his seat again.

"Easy, easy," warned Mr. Bunn. "Later, you can have him. I promise it!"

If the recognition was mutual—and it probably was—the man with yellow eyes gave no sign of it. After one swift, glaring glance at the partners he turned to the detective, nodding.

"All right, I'll bring the car down again in a day or two. It's a beautiful model, and Miss Vandermonde will like it," he said. "It's a perfect car for a lady to handle. Thanks for the trouble you've taken—I certainly hope the lady will soon be fit again."

He nodded once more, started his car, and glided away.

Mr. Bunn, who had stopped, beamed on MacHarrall.

"Buying cars, hey?" he said. "That was a very good-looking 'bus."

MacHarrall nodded.

"Very pretty. And he's a persevering salesman driving her. He's got a fixed idea that if only he can persuade Miss Vandermonde to take a trial run, he's

as good as made a sale. Probably he's right. He's been around all the morning. Queer-looking guy."

Mr. Bunn laughed, reaching for his cigar-case.

"Yes. Have a cigar. . . . But you don't mean to tell me that your people allow Miss Vandermonde to go out on a trial trip in a new car, with any strange salesman that puts in an appearance!"

The detective grinned rather awry.

"What the folk on her pay-roll allow, or don't allow, cuts very little ice with Miss Vandermonde," he stated. "You've heard of that centurion gentleman who used to say: 'Do this,' and lo! it was done; or, 'Undo this,' and behold! it was undone? Kind of autocratic. That's Miss Vandermonde—what she wants, she has—what she wishes to do, she does. That's all there is to it."

Mr. Bunn nodded sympathetically as he engaged his gear.

"Still, speaking as a friend of the family, I should go pretty considerably out of my way to prevent or jack-up in some way or other any plan of Miss Vandermonde to take a trial run alone in that car with that salesman."

He dropped in his clutch.

"For I don't like his face—don't like it at all," he called, and moved on, leaving MacHarrall nodding in hearty agreement.

Fortworth was fidgeting and scowling like a man wrestling mentally with a difficult problem.

"And what might be the idea of letting that yellow-eyed hound get away?" he asked sourly, as they rolled away to Purdston. "He was as good as in my hands."

I don't see your idea at all—and it's my opinion that you've got yourself so mixed and muddled, that you don't know good news from bad——”

“Hardly that, Squire, hardly that. Things are getting so plain to me that you may say I can now read the whole situation at a glance. And a very interesting situation it is—not to say dangerous.”

“Dangerous to the girl, d'ye mean?”

Mr. Bunn answered slowly.

“Not so dangerous to her as to her uncle, Whitney Vandermonde!”

Fortworth stared.

“Whitney Vandermonde! How can it matter to him? He's in America, ain't he? Weir and his crooks may have long arms, but they aren't long enough to reach over to the States and hurt Whitney Vandermonde. If you want my opinion, it is the girl—Patricia—who is in danger.”

Mr. Bunn shook his head.

“No, no. I don't anticipate any harm coming to her. No harm at all—at present.”

Fortworth lost patience.

“But, damn it all, man, have some sense,” he roared. “Here she is, just been kidnapped by a thoroughly dangerous gang of Chinese and half-Chinese crooks—you proved that yourself—who have driven away with her in a car to Lord knows where, leaving no trace, and yet you've got the armour-plated front to turn to me, and say it isn't the girl who is in danger, but her uncle, thousands of miles away in the States. Is it *sense*? What reason is there in it?”

Fortworth scowled through the wind-screen.

“ Personally speaking—as a friend and partner—my own opinion is that you’ve got things muddled up like a dish of scrambled eggs. For instance, about an hour ago, you conclusively proved to me that Weir and Co. had kidnapped Patricia Vandermonde on the golf-links. If so, perhaps you’ll explain how Weir can be engaged in rushing her away from here to some safe place, and at the same time, how he can be hanging around as a motor-salesman trying to get Miss Vandermonde to come for a trial run in a new car !

“ And if Weir—by some miracle—is both kidnapping her and trying to sell her a car—how does that put a sharp old bird in America, Whitney Vandermonde, in danger at the same time ? ” he went on. “ The fact is that you’ve got a bit mixed, old man, and what we want to do is to scrap your accumulation of theories and hunches and reconstruct from the foundations upwards—with facts ! ”

“ Lord, how you do run on, Squire,” said Mr. Bunn satirically. “ Have you finished ? ”

“ Finished ? Why, I suppose so ! It’s clear enough that you are mixed up, isn’t it ? ”

But the senior partner shook his head rather seriously.

“ No. Listen to me. Miss Vandermonde *is* kidnapped, and there’s an impersonator of the lady lying in bed at Harchester Hall, now. But Patricia was not kidnapped by Yellow Eyes and his crew. I see that now. He doesn’t even know that she has been kidnapped. He’s hanging around with that car on the chance of getting the girl he believes to be Miss Vandermonde—but who is the impersonator. I made a slight

miscalculation just now—but I've corrected it. The sight of Weir in that new car put me right at once."

"Do you mean they've got Miss Vandermonde already?"

"No!" snapped Mr. Bunn. "But she's been kidnapped."

"By whom?"

"By her secretary, Arnold Scanlon."

Fortworth gasped.

"Man alive, what's the matter with you? We left Scanlon in his study, not a quarter-of-an-hour ago!"

Mr. Bunn smiled.

"Sure we did. Where else would he be? But the gang of which he is the chief has got Patricia Vandermonde all right. Probably the actual work was done by the two men who came to Harchester Hall with the mysterious woman at midnight. The whole thing's as clear to me as day. I reckon Scanlon's men and the impersonator-girl called last night for last instructions and, as far as the girl was concerned, a last inspection by Scanlon. Remember how he studied her hands, her ears, teeth and legs. Why? Obviously, he was comparing these points—noticeable points—with the same ones in Patricia Vandermonde. It was necessary. But evidently she matched closely enough. And if her lips and teeth look a little different presently, people will attribute it to this fake golf accident. And remember that Scanlon and that other lady-confederate of his are cunning enough to get rid of all Miss Vandermonde's personal servants as soon as possible. Like that lady's maid, for instance. D'ye see?"

Fortworth saw, a little sulkily.

"But how does this put old Whitney Vandermonde in danger?" he asked. "We'll take it that it's as you say—Scanlon's gang has kidnapped Patricia and put an impersonator in her place; this yellow-eyed gorilla Weir, and his Chinese gang, are still trying to kidnap the impersonator, believing her to be Patricia; Larry Warrener and his old retainer, Croucher, are hovering around, on the watch; and you and I have got a general bird's-eye view of the whole business. Right. But how does it put Whitney Vandermonde in danger?"

Mr. Bunn did not answer at once. He was steering the big car into the narrow entrance drive of their own place. But his eyes were on the figure of a telegraph boy just ahead.

The reached their front door at about the same moment as the boy, who promptly handed Mr. Bunn a telegram.

The old adventurer read it—a long cable—in silence. Then he gave the boy a coin.

"No answer just now, son," he said, and handed the cable to his partner. This is what Fortworth read:

"Five minutes prior this cable serious attempt assassination party named. No arrest. Reason attributed party's Bill Exclusion Yellow Races, United States. Cable fully information likely useful to personal guards said party. Many threats.

"TONY."

Fortworth frowned over it.

"Well, what's the answer to the riddle?" he demanded.

Mr. Bunn glanced round, then, dropping his voice, explained.

"It's simple enough. The 'party' Tony means is Whitney Vandermonde. He's championing a Bill in Congress for excluding all Chinese and Japanese from the United States *without* loopholes for evasion—also for deporting or repatriating all Yellow men at present living there. They seem to expect trouble from the Yellow element concerned. That's reasonable enough. The Chinese are well-dug-in in certain places over there—Japs, too. Tony thinks the assassin tried to kill Vandermonde on that account. It's likely—but not so likely as the cause I can give him. So far, the Yellow interests over there don't want to kill Whitney Vandermonde. My guess is that they are backing these Cobra Tong wolves, Weir and Co., to kidnap Patricia, and use her safety as a lever to force her uncle to drop his Anti-Yellow campaign."

"Yes, I see that. But, if it's right, who *did* try to kill Vandermonde?" he asked, staring at his partner.

Mr. Bunn's heavy face was hard and grim, and his eyes were stonily green as he answered:

"Arnold Scanlon! I don't mean personally. But he gave the word. And he gave it this morning. By cable. If we cared to inquire long enough in the right place I will guarantee that we should find out that Scanlon sent a cipher cable—perhaps of one word—to America, yesterday or to-day," explained Mr. Bunn.

"But why? Why kill, or have killed, the man who pays him probably a good salary?"

Mr. Bunn surveyed his partner with a grimly patient smile.

"If Whitney Vandermonde died, who would inherit his money?" he asked in the tone of a teacher who says to a child, "If you add two to two, what is the result?"

Fortworth snorted.

"Why, Patricia Vandermonde."

"Correct," said Mr. Bunn. "And where's Patricia Vandermonde?"

Fortworth's face puckered suddenly.

"Except for three or four people, everybody believes that she is in bed at Harchester Hall," went on Mr. Bunn. "But we know that the woman in Miss Vandermonde's bed at this minute, is a—a thing of Scanlon's—an impostor!"

He leaned closer, his face very serious.

"There's another thing, too. If that attempt to kill Whitney Vandermonde had been successful, let me tell you that Patricia Vandermonde's life would not have been worth a minute's purchase. They would have—disposed of her—and gone all out for the inheritance."

"They could never have got away with it," said Fortworth.

"Couldn't they? You want to guess again, Squire. Whitney Vandermonde is worth at least ten million—pounds, not dollars—Scanlon and Co. would not reach out—or wait—for everything. But they could get hold of a huge fortune before—if ever—they had to vanish."

Forthworth saw that.

For a moment the two adventurers stared at each other in silence. It was a skilfully planned and daring plot which the astute old rascal had laid bare, and but for the coming of that deadly scoundrel Weir

and his Tong-men, bent on a very similar mission, one which probably would have succeeded—indeed might even yet succeed.

Mr. Bunn had picked up the loose threads and woven them into a fool-proof fabric of evidence.

“Here’s how we stand. Patricia’s a prisoner of the Scanlon gang. An impersonator reigns at Harchester Hall, instead. The Scanlon crew mean to kill Whitney Vandermonde if they can, so that the impersonator inherits . . . Yellow Eyes’ gang don’t know this. They mean to kidnap the girl at Harchester Hall, thinking she is Patricia Vandermonde. When they have got her they intend to threaten Whitney Vandermonde with her death, unless he throws up his Anti-Yellow Races Bill. Probably they are being well-paid for this by some Yellow political organisation—and certainly Weir will try for some plunder from Whitney Vandermonde on his own account. That’s the situation, Squire—and it’s a bad one.”

He nodded reflectively.

“Well, what are you going to do about it?” demanded Fortworth.

Mr. Bunn drained his glass, and leaned back in his arm-chair.

“To tell you the truth, Squire,” he said calmly, “to tell you the exact truth, I’m going to begin by having a bit of a snooze,” and settled down with the evident intention of keeping his word.

Fortworth stared. He had been deeply impressed by his partner’s elucidation.

“And meantime you’re going to let the Vandermondes take their chance,” he said harshly.

Mr. Bunn beamed up at the dark face of his partner.

"Squire, be easy," he suggested. "I have my hand on the lever of the machine, and I've done everything that human power can do—in fact, slightly more—to take care of them. The urgent thing at present is that Whitney Vandermonde should be well guarded. I've sent Tony a cable which will fix that. What is now needed is a clever brain and clear thinking. I'll supply both—*after* I've had a bit of a snooze."

And he closed his eyes forthwith.

Fortworth stared at him in an extremely dissatisfied sort of way for a moment, then nudged him rather violently.

"What about Patricia?" he growled. "What's going to happen to her—while you're asleep?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Bunn.

"But what's the matter with setting about the task of finding her?" persisted his partner.

"I have set about it."

"Set about it! . . . In your chair!"

Mr. Bunn yawned.

"Sing Song is watching out somewhere up by Harchester Hall. He's got his orders and knows what to do. He's going on there after he's sent the cable to Tony. . . . You've got nothing to worry over. Take a nap yourself—and put your trust in me. . . . I am at the wheel, and if I land the business . . . on the rocks . . . you can call me no steersman. Take an eye-ful of sleep, Squire—you'll get none to-night, I promise you that."

And, thus muttering, Mr. Bunn gently "dropped off."

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN he forecasted a sleepless night for his partner, Mr. Bunn was expecting to spend the dark hours either in exploring the subterranean passage, or in following up after the captor of Miss Vandermonde, providing any clue to her whereabouts were forthcoming.

But, by the time dinner was finished that evening Sing Song had not returned, nor given any sign that Scanlon had moved from Harchester Hall, or received or sent any telegrams to the lady's guards.

"I don't know what your ideas may be," said Fortworth, half-way through a cigar, after the meal, "but I'd like to point out to you that time is passing, and we're no nearer giving Miss Vandermonde a helping hand than we were five hours ago."

"True," agreed Mr. Bunn thoughtfully, "very true. It's high time we got a move on."

He rose, poured himself a generous liqueur brandy, gave it a good home, and set down the empty glass.

"Have the Blooms gone?" he asked. "I told them they could go up to town and see that things were all right at the flat. Gave them leave to stop at the flat and come down first thing in the morning. They jumped at a chance of a music-hall."

He moved out towards the kitchen, returning almost

at once. "They cleared out as soon as we finished dinner, naturally," he said. "That leaves us the night free for exploration."

He went to a recess at the side of the fireplace, and manipulated the moulding of a panel. In a moment a section of panelling three feet square swung open, revealing, embedded in the wall, the door of a strong safe. This Mr. Bunn opened. He took out a selection of implements which looked uncommonly like burglars' tools.

"We're going to take a little stroll down among the rabbits to-night, Squire," he said cheerfully, as he closed the safe and the panelling above it.

"The underground passage? What do you want that—that—machinery for?" asked Fortworth. "An electric torch or two would do the business well enough, wouldn't it?"

"No doubt. But we don't know what's at the end of the passage, and I am a man who believes that W. J. Prevention is a more useful citizen than Henry G. Cure," explained Mr. Bunn facetiously, studying the array of tools spread out on the table before him.

He added two deep, black silk masks.

"And we'll make it a fancy dress affair," he added "In case we run into somebody we don't want to meet! Scanlon, for instance."

Rather reluctantly, Fortworth donned the grim-looking bit of "fancy dress."

"Can never get rid of an idea that masks are about the most illegal-looking things manufactured," observed Mr. Bunn, studying himself in a mirror with some little interest, tinged with admiration. "Not that I

purpose doing anything particularly illegal," he ran on. "The idea really being to prevent illegality being done—in the long run."

He packed away his tools.

"We'd better take our guns, though Lord knows I hope I'll never need to use one. But we're visiting a very tough crowd to-night—very tough. Are you all right? Comfortable? Good. We'll have a small one just to keep our heads clear."

They made it a whisky-and-soda.

"And now before we start, perhaps it would do no harm if you spilled over an idea or two about what you are going to do—and how you want me to help," observed Fortworth sarcastically. "Here I am—you've got me all dolled up like Domino Dick the Masquerader—what's the idea? What do I do now I'm wearing blinkers?"

Mr. Bunn laughed.

"Now, you're ready, I see—give you a drink and let you have a grumble and you'd face demons! That's about your form, squire, hey? . . . Well, what we're going to do, with luck, is to fetch away from Harchester Hall the lady-impostor at present posing as Miss Vandermonde!"

"Fetch away a rattlesnake!" ejaculated the startled Fortworth. "Why? What use will she be to us when we've got her?"

"I'll tell you, Squire! As long as we can keep this girl hidden away from Scanlon and his crowd, it follows that the real Patricia and her uncle will be safe! D'ye see that? It can't benefit Scanlon and Co. to get Whitney Vandermonde or Patricia put out of the way

if the false heiress can't be produced. And they couldn't find another impersonator at a minute's—or a month's, perhaps a year's—notice. This girl was not trained in a day—no matter how much she may resemble Patricia. If we get her to-night, and hold her, Scanlon will be helpless—in fact, he'll be eager to keep Whitney and Patricia from harm—until he finds his girl again. Once we've got her, we've only got to put 'paid' to Little Aldebaran Yellow-Eyes—of the South Chinese Army—to leave our way clear to put Whitney wise—expensively wise, you may say."

"Huh! . . . Sounds feasible," said Fortworth. "Suppose we get on with it."

Mr. Bunn glanced at the clock.

"Getting about the right time—eleven o'clock. You're right, Squire. Come on, then. Follow the old man."

Carefully switching off all lights as they went they descended to the small inner cellar, beyond the big cellar. Between them they dragged away the wine-bin and, behind the bin, the damp, time-worn slab, brick-faced to match the walls, which had so long masked the mouth of the tunnel, and peered into the black hole.

"I've taken pleasanter strolls of an evening," muttered Mr. Bunn, sniffing at the dank earthy odour emanating from the pitch-dark entrance.

He lit two candles.

"Carry it low," he warned, "with your torch in the other hand. If the candles burn badly or go out, stop, and work back. The candle's not for light but to warn us if the tunnel's full of poisonous gas."

He caught up an armful of straw bottle-covers.

"May have to burn a small bonfire or two," he muttered. "Ready? Come on then—into it, Squire! Follow my figure!"

Bending low he crept into the tunnel, his partner after him.

For a moment the faint glow of their candles illumined the dark mouth of the passage, then the glow died out. They were "on their way."

Slowly and with considerable caution the partners worked forward into the blind darkness of the passage.

Beyond an occasional angry oath from the touchy Fortworth as periodically he hit his head against the roof they said little for the first fifty yards. Then Mr. Bunn waved his torch round. The light shone on the low bricked roof and walls of the tunnel.

"Whoever built this horizontal well knew his job," said the old adventurer. "I don't claim to be much of a subterranean architect, but considering how many hundreds of years it's been in existence it's in an extraordinary state of repair. Damp as the devil, of course, and smells like a mushroom cellar, but the bricks are sound and in place. There must be a vent somewhere, for the air isn't bad—though it's far from good. Come on!"

Mr. Bunn was right. The air in that burrow, if not entirely sweet, was breathable, and bore witness to the existence of a vent somewhere. Ten minutes later they found it—in the form of a small square opening on the right-hand side. Carefully Mr. Bunn thrust his torch through this opening, knocking a lump of mortar, green with damp, off a ledge. Several seconds

later a heavy plunge came to his ears corroborating what the torch had already made plain to him—that the air vent opened on to the side of a deep well.

“We’re getting pretty close to Harchester Hall,” said Mr. Bunn. “I don’t remember ever seeing or hearing of a deep well in the middle of the park. Come on!”

They continued their mole-like progress along the tunnel. Presently Mr. Bunn halted.

“We’re on the up slope,” he announced in a booming whisper. “Take it quietly. We’re there or thereabouts.”

“High time, too. I’ve got a crick in my back for life,” growled Fortworth.

“What’s a crick or two! I tell you this is a first-class tunnel,” said Mr. Bunn, adding, as he struck his head violently against the roof—“bit low in the ceiling, though! . . . Later on, when we’ve got more time we’ll take a look round those recesses we passed coming along! We may find a chest of hidden treasure——”

“Chest of hidden devils,” snarled Fortworth impolitely.

“Well, well, maybe so,” agreed Mr. Bunn absently, peering ahead.

The slope upwards became more and more pronounced, until presently the bricked floor gave way to a flight of steep, narrow stone steps. The brick of the walls also yielded to roughly dressed stone. The stairway was just wide enough for them to pass, brushing a shoulder against each side, and it wound so sharply, in such close corkscrew spirals, that once Mr. Bunn muttered something about not knowing

whether he was walking "backward or frontward." But it was about the last joke he made during the journey, for even as he spoke he narrowly escaped concussion of the brain against a stone slab that abruptly ended the stairs.

"Easy, Squire," he said softly. "We've arrived."

His torch played like a baby searchlight over the walls encompassing him.

But they were blank and utterly devoid of any sign of an entrance to the stairway from the house.

"Humph, that's queer. These old Tudor or Jacobean sportsmen would never have taken the trouble to have hidden the tunnel-side door-handle. It's the other side they had to trouble about. Back down a step or two, Squire."

The "squire" did so.

A moment later Mr. Bunn had found what he was looking for—a little door that once had been painted stone colour. Let in, flush with the wood, was a heavy stirrup-shaped iron handle. So beautifully made, and so perfectly seasoned had been the ancient oak that, even now, hundreds of years after it had been made, the loop of iron fitted or moulded so perfectly into its groove that Mr. Bunn was called upon to produce a curious hook-shaped tool to claw out the handle. It came out slowly, rasping a little as it turned on its spindle—precisely like a rusty door-knocker being raised after a long lapse of time.

"Got it!"

Mr. Bunn tentatively tried it, turning gently each way, pressing a little, pulling a little. He understood about doors and locks and such things, did Mr. Bunn,

and he handled this one as if he loved it. He tapped it, smoothed it, listened to it, all so very gently and smoothly that his acrid partner was on the point of telling him to taste it when he turned.

"All right," he said softly. "It opens away from us, and the hinges are concealed some way. It needn't hinder us a great while unless it's plastered over on the other side."

He was busy for a few moments, then gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"They were a bit behind the times with their locks in those days," he chuckled. "And here is where we take a chance. Get your back against the wall, and one of your feet against the door, and when I say 'Push,' put on a slow, increasing pressure."

For a long time he remained with his ear against the door.

"Not a sound. We'll risk it."

He applied himself and a slim, bent steel tool to the door.

Fortworth pushed.

They were in luck, it seemed.

The door swung slowly outward, with hardly a sound. It opened on to a musty darkness.

A minute later the partners were standing in a small lumber room, full of odds and ends, broken furniture, and such things, peering with some admiration into a huge shelfless cupboard of worm-eaten, ancient oak, built into the wall. One corner of the back of this cupboard was formed by the little door giving access to the tunnel. The room itself had once been panelled, but the panelling was too plain to be of any great

value. Two of the panels exactly filled (and covered) the little door.

"H'm, very neat. I'm not surprised it's never been discovered. Wonder how Weir learned of it," muttered Mr. Bunn, softly closing the door of the wardrobe-like cupboard. "However, we're not here to hold a wondering competition. We'd better take a look round."

It was a curious quest. They had come to take away a doubly protected woman—guarded on the one hand by those who believed her to be Patricia Vandermonde, namely, several highly paid and skilful detectives camouflaged as servants, specially picked by the powerful and influential Whitney Vandermonde, and, on the other hand, by the treacherous Arnold Scanlon and his secret associates who looked to this woman to secure them a great fortune.

Outside the door of the room the partners listened. From somewhere downstairs, on the ground floor in a distant part of the house, someone was playing the piano—probably, breathed Mr. Bunn, the lady friend who had betrayed Patricia at the golf-links.

"It's just likely that Scanlon may be with her," said the senior partner softly.

They prowled forward.

"This is the oldest part of the building. Nothing for us here," whispered Mr. Bunn, glancing at the small, plain doors they passed. "*She'll* probably be sleeping in the best bedroom in the place—hey?—somewhere there!"

He pointed beyond a heavy curtain at the end of the narrow corridor in which they stood, glided to the

curtain and cautiously peered out to see a very long, lofty landing, or corridor, with a railed gallery occupying a third of its length, overlooking the great hall on the ground floor. Softly lighted though this big landing was, yet they could see well enough to note its elaborate, luxurious furnishing and decoration. Plants, statuary, antique chairs, thick, soft carpets—these things Mr. Bunn noted.

Then he drew back suddenly, without sound. He had caught a faint tinkle of china.

A trim maid-servant, carrying a tray, was coming along the corridor. She passed the curtain, humming softly to herself, her footsteps noiseless on the thick, soft carpet, and went on to a room just past the gallery, where she paused and knocked, totally unconscious of the masked face peering at her from behind the curtain.

"Listen!" conveyed Mr. Bunn, more by the pressure of his fingers on his partner's sleeve than by his whisper.

They heard the soft tap of the maid at a door, a few words, a faint tinkling from the tray. Then silence. They waited. A few seconds later the door opened again and a soft rustle of skirts came like a sigh to them.

"Will you be needing anything else for Miss Vandermonde to-night, Nurse?" came the voice of the maid.

"No, thank you, Milly. I can see to anything that may be needed during the night. Is Mr. Scanlon in the library? Very well. Tell Greer to bring my tray to the library and I will have my *bowillon* while I tell him how Miss Vandermonde is progressing. Don't disturb her. She wishes to be alone while she tries to

eat something—she is a little sensitive about her lips. But they will soon be better. I shall be back with her in a quarter of an hour. Good night, Milly.”

“Good night, Nurse.”

The figure of the maid repassed the curtain, as she returned to the service region of the house, and the rustle of the skirts of the nurse died away down the main staircase.

Mr. Bunn’s fingers closed on his partner’s muscular arm like steel hooks.

“Our luck’s with us, Squire. It’s now or never. That ‘nurse’ is in the fraud, too. Come on—we’ve got fourteen minutes.”

They stole out on to the sound-muffling carpet and a second later were at the door of the invalid’s room. Mr. Bunn did not knock. He turned the handle noiselessly, and they stepped inside closing the door behind them.

A kimono-clad girl, bewilderingly like Patricia Vandermonde, who was curled on a big couch near the fireplace, half turned her head lazily, evidently expecting to see the nurse returning for something forgotten.

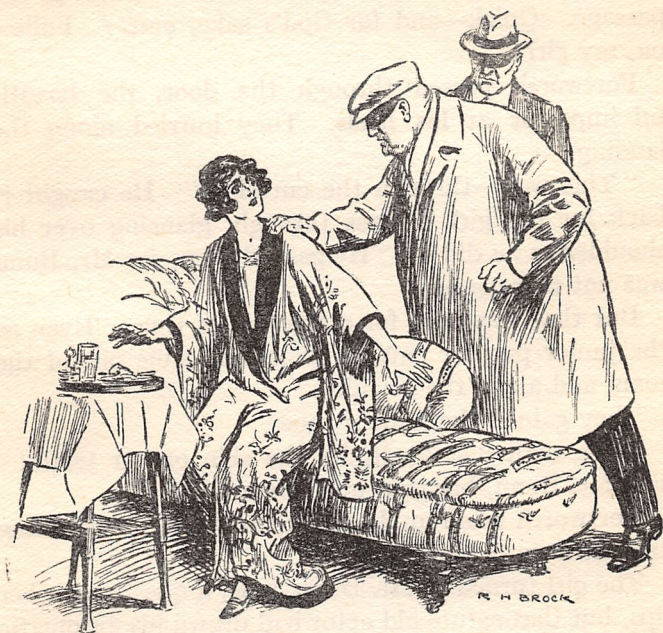
Her eyes widened.

“Nor a word,” said Mr. Bunn urgently. “Get up and come with us at once—unless you want to be arrested within the next three minutes for kidnapping and impersonating Miss Vandermonde. The detectives are in downstairs. Scanlon sent us. Quick!”

He saw that her lips were untouched—and her hand unbound. The useless bandages lay on the couch beside her. She had slipped them off to deal with the contents of the tray.

She blanched, her fine eyes widening. But she was very quick, and rose instantly.

"Quick!" insisted Mr. Bunn, harsh and anxious. "The game's gone right up! Scanlon's got away—



"COME WITH US . . . THE DETECTIVES ARE IN DOWNSTAIRS . . ."

but the others! God, the police are pouring into the place! Some fool has ruined the whole thing! Come on—quick! Never mind the cloak!"

Like most criminals she must have been expecting in her secret heart some such surprise as this, for not a shadow of suspicion crossed her face. She was

completely alarmed—stampeded. Her eyes darted to the dressing-table, then back.

“Oh! Oh! Which way?”

Mr. Bunn glanced round swiftly.

“Lead on,” he said to Fortworth. “Back to the passage. Quick—and for God’s sake, *quiet!* Follow on, my girl!”

Fortworth passed through the door, the beautiful impostor at his heels. They hurried along the landing.

“This way—through the curtain!” He caught it back for the girl to pass through, glancing over his shoulder as he did so. He gasped then, for Mr. Bunn was not to be seen.

But that was only for a fraction of time. Even as the junior partner paused Mr. Bunn came out of the room and along the corridor.

They gained the lumber room.

“We shall just do it, by the skin of our teeth!” said Mr. Bunn, bringing up the rear.

Fortworth was fumbling at the cupboard concealing the entrance to the tunnel.

The girl turned to Mr. Bunn, pale, a question on her lips, but that astute old actor had drawn his automatic and was glaring back through the door of the lumber room—as one at bay glares back at his pursuers.

“Get on—get on!” he jarred over his shoulder. “They’re pouring up the main stairs——”

The secret door creaked.

“This way,” said Fortworth. “Stone steps—nothing to be afraid of. Follow me.”

They entered.

The bulk of Mr. Bunn blocked the entry behind them for a second, then the secret door thudded to.

"Safe—with luck!" said Mr. Bunn, sighing loudly. "But it was the nearest thing I've ever known. Get on—get on, in front there. This is no place for conversation and we're not out of the wood yet. If they spot that those panels have been moved they'll be after us like weasels after rabbits."

They hurried on, the girl in the middle.

Half-way she halted. She had got over her first flurry and had begun to think.

"But—wait a minute—who are you men?" she said.

Mr. Bunn was ready.

"Didn't Scanlon ever hint that he had a card or two up his sleeve?" he returned. "Well, we're the cards he meant. A man like Scanlon doesn't take up a pastime like kidnapping and impersonating without planning emergency exits, my dear."

It was the purest bluff—but it sounded right and the girl accepted it.

"He should have warned me!" she muttered resentfully.

"Well—is that altogether the height of gratitude?" chided Mr. Bunn. "You're away—safe from the police. What more do you want?"

"But——" she began, then stopped. It was clearly not her intention to quarrel with them until she knew more about them—and was in somewhat more congenial surroundings.

"Well, I suppose it's all right, and I'm very much obliged to you and all that sort of thing," she said

with a touch of harshness. "But considering that you've rushed me away without a rag to my back—except this kimono—or a speck of jewellery—you don't expect me to sing any psalms of praise, do you? Suppose we get on."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Bunn.

A few minutes later Fortworth passed the word back that they were coming to their own cellar. The tunnel was narrowing and becoming a little lower.

Mr. Bunn heard his partner sigh heavily as he squeezed out of the tunnel.

The girl crept out next, and Mr. Bunn, bending low to save his head, followed her, almost on his hands and knees.

He was aware of a blaze of light in the cellar—Fortworth's torch, evidently—as he crawled forward.

Then something beat a fiery stab of pain into his brain and he dropped on his face, half in the tunnel, half out, writhing feebly.

Dimly he was aware of strong hands dragging him forward. With a violent effort of will he looked up.

It seemed to his fading mind that the cellar seethed with Chinamen. Their evil-eyed, yellow faces swirled before him, grinning down like the faces of demons peering through fog . . . one of them was gripping the girl in the kimono lightly and she seemed to be screaming though her voice sounded faint and far-off. The body of Fortworth lay sprawled on the floor just clear of the tunnel mouth . . . and then, looming like a huge, fierce mask close to his own, blotting out all the others, came a face he knew—a pale, wicked face

in which flared two glaring yellow eyes—seeming as big as saucers.

It was Major Aldebaran Weir.

“Out to the car with her, quick!” said a voice. “I’ll see to these fools. A couple of thorns—and—finish!”

Something pricked Mr. Bunn sharply in the temple, and he seemed to fall face forward into a profound and abysmal darkness.

CHAPTER XV

FOR a long time Mr. Bunn and his partner, Fortworth, lay very still and silent in the darkness of the wine-cellar.

The men of the Cobra Tong had vanished, taking the girl with them, within a second or so of dealing with the adventurers. In their haste they had not troubled to thrust the unconscious men back into the dark cavity of the tunnel entrance and close the brick-faced door on them. They thought—with reason—that both Smiler Bunn and Fortworth were past giving any trouble.

At last, the noise of an arm brushing over the stone floor broke the black silence, and a heavy groan sounded on the stagnant air.

Mr. Bunn was moving—painfully.

“What happened, Squire, hey? . . . Oh, yes, those damned Chinks were waiting for us as we came out, weren’t they?”

There was no answer.

“Hey, Squire! You there?”

A note of real anxiety deepened Mr. Bunn’s voice. There was a faint sound in the darkness of one fumbling and suddenly the glare of an electric torch opened the gloom.

Mr. Bunn had found the torch which had dropped

from his hand when he was spread-eagled by the pistol-butt of one of the Cobra men.

The pale ray darted about the floor, finally settling on the body of Fortworth in a corner to the right.

"Hey, Squire! Pull yourself together!"

Mr. Bunn, irked by a pain at the temple, sharper and more local than the dull, heavy throb hammering inside his head as a result of the fierce blow which had felled him, put up his hand and brought away an ivory thorn. He flashed his ray on the thing, ignoring the thin stream of blood trickling down his cheek.

His face glimmered white as he saw it.

"My God!" he breathed and glanced dully at his wrist watch.

"Half-past one!"

His sigh of relief echoed in that dark, confined place like a rush of air through a door ajar.

They could not have issued from the tunnel later than half-past twelve. And if that thorn had been planted in his temple then he should long ago have been dead unless——

The old adventurer's mind went back to a scene in their London flat—Sing Song carefully replacing the lacquered case of thorns in the pocket of Fan Tzu Kang or Major Aldebaran Weir, having "unloaded" them and made them harmless. Sing had destroyed the swift poison at their tips either by fire or acid, and Bunn knew that he owed his life to the faithful yellow valet.

"A good lad, Sing—a damned good lad. Let me see—did I raise his money or did I only promise to? . . . must speak about it."

He rose rather shakily and went across to his partner. The torch ray revealed an ugly bruise on the forehead of Fortworth, and in the neck, just under the curve of the chin, was sticking another of those thorns.

For a second Mr. Bunn stared, hesitating to examine his partner.

He knew that if that thorn had been flicked by the man with the yellow eyes Fortworth lived—for Weir's thorns were harmless.

But if one of his Chinese helpers had flicked it—Fortworth was a dead man. For all of the Cobra gang were armed with the fiendish little ivory splinters—and only Weir's and those of the dead Chinaman in the wood had been rendered harmless.

Mr. Bunn steeled himself, and bent over. He drew out the thorn, placed it carefully aside, and put his ear over the heart of his partner.

It was beating steadily.

Mr. Bunn fell to work on Fortworth, aided by the brandy flask without which he rarely travelled more than ten yards from his hearth, home and sideboard.

Five minutes later Fortworth was on his feet, extremely groggy, but supported by his fury, his partner's arm, and the contents of the flask.

"Easy, Squire, easy—things might have been worse," said Mr. Bunn. "Let's get out of this and move upstairs."

He replaced the door of the tunnel.

"You can see what happened. Weir and his gang prowling about found the house apparently empty, and had a look round. They discovered that the tunnel door was open, guessed we were in the tunnel—

they may have heard us coming back—and simply waited to knock us on the head when we came out. Yellow Eyes must have had the most pleasant surprise of his life to see the very girl (or so he will think) he's been working day and night to kidnap come out of the tunnel straight into his hands—like a peach dropping from a tree into a boy's pocket."

"But suppose she gives herself away—owns that she isn't Miss Vandermonde," demurred Fortworth, interested in spite of his shaky condition.

"She might not do that. She's a pretty hard case, that lady, and she may consider that she's safer with a crowd like that while they think she's the real Patricia Vandermonde instead of the imitation one. Now, let's get upstairs. My head feels as if those scoundrels laid us out with sledge hammers."

Painfully they made their way upstairs.

The Tong-men had evidently not lingered there long, for things were very much as the partners had left them.

About the first thing Mr. Bunn did—while Fortworth opened a bottle of champagne, a medicine in which both of them had profound belief—was to go to the concealed safe, elaborately hidden away somewhere behind the fireplace, and fumble there for a few moments.

"Nothing touched there, Squire," he announced with a sudden access of cheerfulness. "It would take a better man than Yellow Eyes to find that little nest of rainy-day eggs. And now we'll get ourselves seen to."

They did so.

Perhaps half-an-hour later, Mr. Bunn, like his

partner, generously court-plastered and in his dressing-gown, summed up.

"Well, there's one thing," he said rather challengingly. "This night's work has simplified things—in a way. We know where we are, anyhow."

"Oh, do we," growled Fortworth. "And where's that, eh?"

"Well, we know that the real Patricia Vandermonde is held by Scanlon's gang, and the false one by the Cobra gang who think she's the real one. We know that—thankee, Squire, half a glass—well, well, right up, then, if you wish it—we know that as long as Scanlon can't produce the false Patricia, the real Patricia is safe. We know that sooner or later we shall find out where the real one is—for that yellow bloodhound of mine, Sing Song, will stick to Scanlon through fire and brimstone till he goes to see her. And we don't need to know where Yellow Eyes has taken the false Patricia to—for before long he or his Chinese employers will be opening negotiations with Whitney Vandermonde about her. We shall be useful to Whitney then, hey? Knowing what we know. So, on the whole, I don't see any reason why we needn't slide off with easy minds to where we belong—and that's bed."

And Fortworth for once agreeing "unanimously," they promptly made it so.

Although Mr. Bunn had summed things up tolerably neatly and shrewdly, yet he had by no means dealt with the present state of the affair completely or exhaustively. There were, for example, Mr. MacHarrall

and his underlings to be borne in mind. Also Larry Warrener and his tough and craggy retainer Mr. Jeff Croucher. What were these gentlemen going to do about it when, as was inevitable, it was discovered that no Miss Vandermonde—real or false—was in her bedroom or any other part of Harchester Hall?

This was a question which painted itself in thick, luminous lettering on Mr. Bunn's somewhat hashed and heated brain when Mr. Ferdinand Bloom (himself looking by no means invigorated by his night in town) awakened him with a cup of tea at about nine o'clock on the following morning.

Mr. Bunn pressed one hand hard upon the little court-plaster star on his aching temple and the other softly upon the large court-plaster crowning the bulbous growth raised by the pistol-butt of the Tong-man in the overnight disaster of the cellar.

"Good morning, sir," ventured Bloom.

"Good morning be damned for a tale, Bloom," replied Mr. Bunn. "I've got corkscrews in my brain—and you look to me like a man recovering from drowning. Have you got any headache tablets—opium—chloroform—prussic acid in the house? If so, get some. Hold hard, man—give me that telegram on the tray and wait while I drink that tea. . . . That's better. Take away the tray and bring me something for a splitting headache. A brandy-and-soda or a brick of aspirin or something. You know about headaches—with your experience."

He tore open the telegram as Bloom retreated.

It was a cable from his brother Tony—in New York—as follows.

"Party named anxious sailing Aquamania to-day, Fanchon self attending.—Tony."

Mr. Bunn forgot his headache, staring at the cable. This meant that the great Whitney D. Vandermonde himself was coming over to take a slant at the situation in person. Also that among his guards were to be Tony and Fanchon, Tony's wife—heads of the flourishing Bohun Bureau of Private Investigation, Chicago.

"Old Vandermonde must have a high opinion of Tony and Fanchon—for they wouldn't leave their business for less than a small fortune," mused Mr. Bunn. "And he's right. They are birds with the clues!"

He meant that they were extremely smart detectives—and he, too, was right. They were.

"I shall be glad to see Tony and his little missus again," he said. "Provided they don't interfere with me."

But his smile was a shade uneasy—for Fanchon had the very strictest ideas about things and there had been occasions in the past when she had been far from satisfied or complimentary about her brother-in-law's moral code.

"Still, Whitney is the man with the say-so—and he'll be bringing his cheque-book and fountain pen!"

Mr. Bunn's face cleared, and he chuckled as Bloom re-entered bearing an old-mahogany coloured one.

"I made it a b. and s., sir."

"And very sensible, too, very sensible. Just turn on my bath. I've got a busy day before me. Sing Song back?"

"No, sir. But you are wanted on the telephone, and a person is waiting to see you."

"And who might *they* be, Bloom?"

"The gentleman on the 'phone seems in a great hurry—he is a Mr. MacHarrall at Harchester Hall, who urgently asks for a few moments' conversation with you—and the other is a person like a poacher giving no name. He has a note which he insists on delivering into your own hands, sir."

Mr. Bunn laboured out of bed, and pulled on a dressing-gown.

"Right, Bloom. Carry on with breakfast. By the time I've finished I shall have scared up an appetite from somewhere."

He paddled downstairs in slippers, dropped a question into the telephone and listened for the next half-minute in silence.

MacHarrall was frantic, but Mr. Bunn did not allow the detective's frenzy to infect him. . . .

"Hey, what's that, MacHarrall? Miss Vandermonde disappeared in the night! . . . Impossible. . . . Hey? That's bad—that's very bad. Incredible . . . me? me help you? How? . . . Oh, that chap—the motor-salesman! Hey, yes, certainly I warned you against . . . no, no particular reason, except that I didn't like the look of him at all. No. He looked like one of these crooks. Yes—crooks. A wrong 'un . . . to my mind. Didn't like his face at all. Hey? Well, I'm a pretty good judge. Got a great natural gift for summing a man up. No—I don't know him. Hey! I'll turn it over in my mind."

The old adventurer paused, thinking, then relented.

"Hey, Mac?" he called. "It's just struck me that motor-salesman had a kind of a Chinese look. . . . Noticed it yourself? Good. Well, haven't I read in the papers something about some Anti-Chinese or Japanese Bill Whitney D. Vandermonde is engineering in America? . . . yes. Well, don't these two things seem to stare each other in the face? . . . Only a suggestion—but ought to be worth thinking over. Hey? Oh, not at all, Mac. Glad to help. If I think of anything else I'll give you a ring—hey?—I say I'll call you up. Good hunting!"

He hung up.

"Well, I've given him a hint as broad as the side of a barn. Should be sorry to see him get into trouble—but, after all, Patricia's safe for the present—and it wouldn't take Master Mac long to land me in the cart if he had half a suspicion. It's up to him now."

He paddled through the hall, and out on to the sunny porch where an excessively seedy-looking person, entirely without visible means of existence (save for a competent-looking cross between a lurcher and a greyhound lying at his feet), awaited him.

Mr. Bunn recognised him as a local poacher.

"Gennelman name of Mr. Warrenner mending theingin of a motor-car stopped me late last night out along, and told me to bring you this note, sir. He said I was to wait till you read it and you would gimme a quid, sir."

"Oh, did he?" said Mr. Bunn.

He opened and read the note, folded it, and "Wait here," he said.

He went indoors, returning a moment later with a

pound note which he offered to the shabby messenger without a word.

The poacher took it, spat on it, and put it next to his heart in some mysterious receptacle, touched his hat, said "Thankee, sir," and went forthwith as completely incurious as his dog.

Mr. Bunn made his way back to the bedroom, and re-opened the note. It was no more than a hasty scrawl upon a sheet torn from a pocket diary and ran, cryptically, as follows:—

"Jeff trailed Chink back to hornet's nest doing sentry saw Yellow Eyes with cobras get away mid-night car lady we interested protecting self Jeff on trail snakes wiring you reliable rendezvous first opportunity.—WARRENER."

Fortworth turning into his partner's room *en route* to his bath, found Mr. Bunn poring intently over the message.

"How're your brains, this morning, Squire?" asked the senior partner. "Would you care to spread 'em thin over this?" He handed the note.

Fortworth glanced through it—then deliberately crossed his eyes, presumably to indicate mental confusion, and returned it.

"Give me something easier with a red-hot head like mine," he demanded. "What is it all about?"

"As I read it," elucidated Mr. Bunn, "it's a note from Larry Warrenner explaining that by some miracle Jeff Croucher followed the trail of that dead Chinaman in the wood back to where he came from, and found

a 'hornet's nest'—meaning the headquarters, probably some furnished house just rented by Weir—full of the gang. While they were 'doing sentry'—watching the house—last night they saw Yellow Eyes and his men drive up with the lady they took from us. Probably there was a mix-up and Yellow Eyes got away with the lady. Thinking she was Miss Vandermonde, Larry and Croucher are after them, and are going to wire us to join them at the first chance. That's about what the note means—Larry wrote it like that because he had to trust it to a poacher without an envelope."

Fortworth nodded.

"And what are you going to do about it?" he inquired.

"Nothing—at present. Larry's following the wrong lady, anyway. And we can't get at him to call him off. There will be plenty for us to do before long. I'm waiting to hear from Sing Song. If Scanlon moves Sing will trail him like his own shadow. Scanlon's the man who will lead us to Patricia . . . Sing Song may wire or 'phone us about Scanlon any moment."

CHAPTER XVI

THE morning passed quietly without any sign from the Chink. "Well, we're ready to jump off at a second's notice, anyway," said Mr. Bunn over lunch. "The car's ready even to the door of the garage being open, our suit-cases are packed and in the car, all we need is to press the self-starter. . . . Preparation is eighty-five per cent. of the battle."

A shadow crossed his face.

"Loose money! I never thought of that. I'm none too well lined for a long trip."

He glanced at his watch as he rose from the table.

"I'll nip down to the bank for some change," he said.

Mr. Bunn could move quick when, in his opinion, quickness was called for, and two minutes later he was running down to Purdston village in the light two-seater runabout. He had left their great Rolls ready for the instant start he confidently expected to be called upon to make just as soon as word came through from Sing Song. It was quite a short run—a mile and a half, perhaps, to the sleepy village, which only contained one bank—a small branch of one of the biggest of South of England banks.

The old adventurer sent the little car along at a good pace and within a few minutes he had pulled up behind a much bigger car that was standing outside

the bank—a long-bonneted, obviously six-cylindere and probably fast five-seated white tourer. It was Miss Vandermonde's "Krugg."

But it was not the white car which suddenly stopped him short outside the door of the bank. It was the number-plate of a dusty, red-painted twin-cylinder Indian motor-cycle, that stood by the curb on the opposite side of the street outside a little sweet-shop—

XZ 9009.

It was the number of the motor-cycle kept by himself and Fortworth for odd purposes and emergencies.

Not that either of the portly partners would have dreamed in their wildest flights of fancy of ever mounting what they regarded as a wholly devil-devised means of locomotion—and one which they frankly feared. Only one member of their establishment ever rode the motor-cycle—and he was Sing Song, the indestructible Chink.

Mr. Bunn stared. The presence of the motor-cycle there told him that the Krugg was being driven by Scanlon—who was probably in the bank. He turned into the sweet-shop.

Inside, as he expected, he found the Chinaman stowing away a large purchase of curious and slightly fly-blown sweets, and endeavouring to explain to the extremely deaf old lady-proprietor that he desired to add to his store a shilling's-worth of butter-sotch. Evidently, the Chink was a believer in the food value of sugar, and, further, expected, before he had finished shadowing Mr. Scanlon, to be called upon to dine casually, hurriedly and lightly. He had gone extremely

short of food for the last twenty-four hours—but he did not appear to care much.

His eyes gleamed as he recognised his owner-driver, and his drawn, yellow face lit up. Like his eating, his sleeping had been negligible for the last two nights; but Mr. Bunn understood him far too well to attempt to take him off his work, or to relieve him.

“Well, Sing, I see you’re sticking closer to our man than a brother. Good work, my lad,” approved Mr. Bunn. “I’m very pleased with you. Are you all right? Got money—petrol? Good! What is it you want—butter-scotch? H’m, not very filling stuff, that. Still—here you are.” Mr. Bunn grabbed a large packet and thrust five shillings into the old lady’s hand.

“Time you get through that you’ll have half-a-dozen different kinds of toothache and no lining to your stomach, my son. However——”

Mr. Bunn was peering through the dusty panes of the shop-window as he spoke, and he broke off suddenly as he noted Scanlon come out from the bank with a dispatch-case in his hand.

“Here’s our man, Sing——”

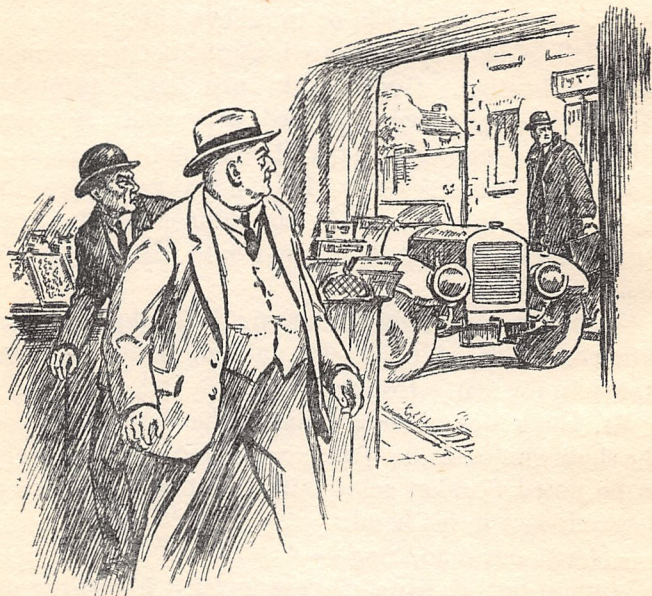
Scanlon put his dispatch-case under a folded rug on the seat of the car, next to the driver’s seat, and paused to light a cigarette. As he did so a clerk appeared at the bank door and called to him.

Scanlon turned and re-entered the bank.

Instantly, Mr. Bunn was out of the sweet-shop, half-dragging Sing Song with him. His wits were working well, and his luck was flourishing like a green bay-tree this morning.

"There's a dispatch-case under the rug on the seat of Scanlon's car, Sing. Just transfer it to my car while I'm in the bank. Understand!"

Sing shot a swift glance up and down the deserted village street.



"HERE'S OUR MAN, SING!"

"Can do, master," he muttered.

Mr. Bunn went into the bank.

Scanlon was there filling in a cheque. Glancing over his shoulder, Mr. Bunn noted instantly that the cheque was already signed in a bold feminine hand—"Patricia Vandermonde."

Evidently the secretary had a bookful of signed blank cheques—and was making full use of them. There appeared to have been an error in the body of a cheque Scanlon had just presented, for the clerk was apologetic.

“Sorry to give you the bother of filling in another cheque, Mr. Scanlon, but as you know, the bank rule is that any alteration or error on a cheque calls for the drawer’s initials. Especially in a big cheque!”

“Oh, no trouble. Rules are rules. I was in a hurry. I understand,” smiled Scanlon. He handed over the fresh cheque, received the old one—on which the clerk had paid, subsequently noting some technical error which he had called Scanlon back to correct, and turned to go.

He recognised Mr. Bunn at once.

“How do, Mr. Scanlon?” said the adventurer cheerfully. “How is Miss Vandermonde to-day? Recovering from her golf accident, I hope. You’re the very man I wanted to see.”

He drew the secretary aside.

“I wanted to hand you out a friendly warning,” he continued softly. “Did it ever occur to you that even in this sleepy part of the world there may be kidnappers about?”

Scanlon started slightly, and his eyes grew hard and wary.

Mr. Bunn handed a cheque to the clerk.

“Give me notes for that, George, will you?” he said casually, and turned to Scanlon.

“You might think me an imaginative sort of man,” he continued, looking about as imaginative as an

overfed farmer, "and I admit that I am—in a way. Just after leaving you yesterday, we ran into a queer-looking motor salesman hanging about with a new car, trying to persuade Mr. MacHarrall to fix up for Miss Vandermonde to take a trial run in the car. Well, I suppose people think I'm a bit of a country bumpkin—and, in a way, I suppose I am—but even a country bumpkin has got brains if he likes to use 'em, Mr. Scanlon. And the instant I set eyes on that motor salesman it flashed into my mind that if one of these kidnappers we see on the cinema screen had a scheme to kidnap a rich woman like Miss Vandermonde, what better way of doing it could he hit upon than to take her for a trial run in a new car—and not bring her back? Hey? How's that for an original idea, Mr. Scanlon? Not so bad for a mere, damn country bumpkin, hey? It isn't only these moving-picture makers that get ideas worthy of Sherlock Holmes with a few whiskies-and-sodas inside him, hey? Anyway, I warned MacHarrall, then and there. And now I'm giving you the benefit of my idea, too!"

He laughed loudly—the breezy, slightly vacant laugh of "a country bumpkin" who has surprised himself by thinking of an idea not more than a quarter of a century old. He did it very well—even though he was listening with one ear to the diminishing roar of a powerful motor-cycle which had just started away from somewhere close outside.

There was a curious blend of sour contempt and keen interest in Scanlon's eyes and tone as he answered.

"Well, that is undoubtedly a novel and up-to-date idea, my dear sir," he said. "And, with my responsi-

bilities, I'll say frankly it is one which I shall keep very much in mind. This motor salesman—he was a queer-looking person, you say? ”

“ He looked like an out-and-out wrong 'un to me. Hard looking, yellow-eyed sportsman. I mentioned it to MacHarrall. I can't exactly describe him. Can't sum up the points of a motor salesman as quickly as I can the points of a cow or a hog—but anyway, he was not a man I'd trust any further than I could throw him—if as far.”

He took a roll of notes from the clerk and without bothering to count them slipped them in his pocket, moving to the door with Scanlon.

“ I thought I'd mention my idea,” he said, as he got into his car. “ For even a fool—if he had any imagination—could see that a lady in the position of Miss Vandermonde is liable to be studied by every scoundrel in the country, hey? Am I right, Mr. Scanlon? ”

He started his engine.

“ To an extent, yes,” agreed Scanlon. “ Yes, on the whole I am with you. What sort of car was it this man had? ”

“ A Vauxhall, I fancy—a new Vauxhall.”

“ You didn't notice the number, by any chance? ”

Mr. Bunn shook his head.

“ Well, no—I didn't. That never occurred to me till about an hour later. Pity. Still, it makes no difference. Probably the man is straight enough. It wouldn't do to judge solely by appearances, hey? . . . Well, I must be moving. Give my respectful compliments to Miss Vandermonde. Good day, Mr. Scanlon.”

He dropped in his gear and clutch, and swung away. Scanlon looked after him for a moment.

"Damned old fool!" muttered the secretary, viciously, climbed into his own car and drove off . . . "I wonder if the old fool hit on the truth by a fluke?" he asked himself as he went.

And he was so interested in finding an answer to his own question that he failed entirely to notice a big red motor-cycle, driven by a yellow-skinned, hard-faced person with a lump (as of butter-scotch) in his cheek, which stole out from a turning at the end of the straggling village street and, at a respectful distance behind—just far enough to be partly obscured by the thin dust-cloud raised by the car and to be unheard—clung to the trail of the car like a swift red shadow.

The first thing Mr. Bunn did on his return to Purdston Old Place was to telephone to MacHarrall at Harchester Hall.

He caught that harassed individual just as he was setting out for London.

"That you, MacHarrall? Well, I want to ask you something. I saw Mr. Scanlon just now, and he said nothing to me about the disappearance of Miss V. Now, it's no affair of mine—but I'd like to know where I stand. In fact, I want to help if there's a chance. I suppose Scanlon has planned out some sort of line of campaign—and if so, it might save my partner and me making fools of ourselves if we knew whether the idea is to keep it quiet while you are making investigations or whether you are calling in Scotland Yard and the Press."

MacHarrall was prompt to reply

"Keep it quiet. Mr. Scanlon—representing Mr. Whitney Vandermonde—thinks that for a day or two we had better work quietly on our own lines. And he's about right. We've got a pretty close idea about the people at the bottom of it all—too long to tell you now—it's big political stuff on the other side—certain powerful guys are trying hard to stop a Bill of Mr. Vandermonde's, and we think they've kidnapped the lady to use an argument against him."

"Surely, surely," agreed Mr. Bunn. "I just wanted to know—being in the secret, as you may say."

"That's all right. Let me know if you happen to learn anything—particularly about that motor salesman." Mr. Bunn promised, and hung up.

He was unfeignedly glad that there was no immediate prospect of the police trampling with large and clumsy feet upon his plans. He was already a busy man—and likely to become even busier.

He said so to the court-plastered Fortworth who strolled in rather aimlessly as he hung up the receiver.

Mr. Bunn smiled and took a little refreshment. He did not bother to mention Mr. Scanlon's dispatch-case—he had already glanced through it and dumped it away on that shelf in the safe which he was reserving for material relating to the affair.

"All we've got to do now is to wait for messages," he said, and settled down in his huge and bed-like chair. "And we may as well wait in comfort. There are still a few bells chiming in my head."

"Mine, too," quoth Fortworth, and helped him "rest."

Outside in the garage the great Rolls-Royce stood

ready to leap into swift activity at a touch; close by, old Corporal, the cross-bred hound, slumbered, still a little sore, but fit to work; in the service regions of the house the Blooms circulated softly, awaiting orders to cart out to the motor the luncheon basket, without which the partners would not have dreamed of embarking on any long voyage, and, in their own place, the adventurers waited with the patience of sleeping men for the signal from Sing Song, which should start them out to the rescue of Miss Vandermonde.

But no signal came, and they went to bed early.

To-night, a strange, uncomfortable and unpleasantly novel uneasiness shared Smiler Bunn's pillow, very effectively scaring away sleep.

He lay in the moonlight, thinking.

"What the devil is gnawing at me to-night?" he asked himself, staring at the moonlit window. "My plans are good enough, aren't they? . . . I guess I can trust Sing to pull off a simple little matter like following a big car to the end of its journey. Break-down? There's not likely to be any breakdown of that animated scooter he's riding that Sing can't put right in less than no time. . . . Still—can't help wishing I'd followed on after him with the little car, and telegraphed Fortworth to follow on with the big car. Two bloodhounds are better than one—certainly, that's so . . . But the Chink's never failed me before . . . A bad crowd, yes—and Scanlon, their boss apparently, is a crafty, dangerous devil . . . And we haven't finished with that yellow-eyed hyæna, Weir, and his crowd yet—or I'm very much mistaken. Two dangerous bunches."

He shook his head in the dark. And suddenly the

clear, hard note of the telephone bell drilled through the silence of the house.

"Hah! Good lad, Sing. There he is!"

Mr. Bunn reached over to the table by the side of the bed.

"Hello! . . . Yes. Winchester coming through—" he chuckled. "Come on then, Winchester! . . . Hello!" . . .

He waited a moment. "Winchester" was slow off its mark, it seemed.

"Hello—hello—hello!" called Mr. Bunn. A faint, tenuous voice—like the voice of a far-off ghost—answered him.

"Master—Sing speaking. Please—you hearing—*master!*—*aa-hh!*"

Something popped sharply—it impinged on Mr. Bunn's ear-drums smartly—a queer, sharp, popping crack—and the voice ceased abruptly.

"Hello? That you, Sing, my lad—I say, is that you?"

But there was no answer—nor, though Mr. Bunn stormed into the telephone for the next ten minutes, aided by Fortworth, aroused by the ring, could another word or sound be extracted from Sing Song. "Winchester" replied that the speaker had rung off.

The partners looked at each other seriously.

"My God, Squire, I don't like it," said Mr. Bunn. "That pop sounded nasty to me, nasty. Like a report—a gun—and it came before Sing had time to say where he was. I—don't like it."

His heavy face was hard and anxious.

"*' . . . Master—aa-hh!'*" Sing said—like that—"he jarred. "It looks to me as if Scanlon has been one too many for him!"

CHAPTER XVII

RARELY had Fortworth seen his normally placid partner more disturbed than he was by the far-off cry in the night from his Chinese retainer, Sing Song.

"I don't like that popping sound. It seemed to cut the lad off the 'phone like a boy's catapult bullet cuts a sparrow off a spout," he said uneasily, as he paddled about his bedroom, throwing off his pyjamas and hurriedly getting into tweeds. "It sounded—bad. I ought never to have sent him up against a bunch like Scanlon and his crowd single-handed."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Fortworth with more confidence, "Sing Song's no chicken; he's about the toughest Chink I've ever heard of. He's been up against wickeder bunches than Scanlon's in his time. I guess you are worrying yourself without any real reason."

"I'm going down to see," said Mr. Bunn, wrestling with his trousers. "I'm anxious about Sing, and being anxious about him means that I'm anxious about Patricia Vandermonde. You want to get it fixed in your mind that Sing is the only link between us and that girl. Sing probably knows where Scanlon has gone, and if that crafty hound suspects that Sing has tracked him, why, how long do you think he'll linger before shifting Patricia and his gang to some safer

place? No, Squire, take it from me that the sooner we get the wheels of the car running round on the Winchester road, the better I shall be satisfied. And the sooner you empty yourself out of those sunset pyjamas of yours, into something more adapted for a long, night motor run, the sooner we shall be away."

He went out into the corridor and bawled loudly round a corner to Bloom.

When Mr. Bunn was in a hurry, he usually managed to get things done rapidly, and in spite of the reluctance of Bloom and Fortworth to shake themselves free from the webs of sleep, not more than half an hour had passed before the partners were drinking hot coffee, preparatory to setting out in the light of a waning moon on their long run to Winchester or its neighbourhood.

"Nip out, Bloom, and let old Corporal off his chain, while we're finishing this coffee," commanded Mr. Bunn, and blew vigorously on the hot liquid. "May as well take him along," he added. "And a bit of Sing's clothing. The old dog has got a very good opinion of Sing, and if we can once cross the lad's trail, I guess we can leave it to Corp to nose his way along to the man who made it."

Fortworth, a little cheered by the coffee, agreed, and five minutes later the big Rolls, with Mr. Bunn at the wheel, was running south-west.

Yet they did not start until well past one, and they were badly delayed once, owing to difficulties with a night-travelling steam pantechmicon that had broken down obliquely across the main road. After some labour and much language, the big vehicle was edged

sufficiently out of the way to enable the Rolls to get by; but the faint steely paleness of dawn was in the east as the big car went humming down off the hills into the ancient city.

"Hah, this smells good to me, Squire," announced Mr. Bunn. "We shan't have so long to wait before we get face to face with——"

"Scanlon, damn him."

"Well, no—I was going to say an early breakfast. We shan't help Sing Song by starving ourselves. After that, we needn't waste time. It may take us the best part of the day to find out where that telephone call came into the Winchester Exchange from. Speaking for myself, I don't expect to find that it came from any house in Winchester. More likely from some out-lying village."

It was late afternoon before the adventurers had overcome the official coyness of the telephone people to get an indication of the address of the person who "possibly" might have put in the overnight trunk-call in which they were interested. It would have been a matter of surpassing simplicity to get the information had they gone in company with an inspector of police. But neither Mr. Bunn nor his partner were in the least anxious to call in the police. They were perfectly well aware that the affair was nearing its climax now, and, from their point of view, the less the police had to do with it the better.

But at last the car went gently out of the town and headed up over the hills to the east. It soon branched off from the main into an extremely "secondary" road, slanting across the hill-side, until it dipped abruptly

into the small village Lowdale—little more than a collection of cottages clustered round a small inn. They passed through the village to a rather better house, on the edge of the little place. This house bore a small, bright brass plate, indicating that it was the residence of one Dr. Harfold.

Here they stopped.

The doctor was at home—a lank man of middle age, and dreamy eyes, who listened rather absently and with a complete lack of curiosity to the inquiry which Mr. Bunn very politely made for particulars concerning the person who had used the doctor's telephone on the previous night.

“Oh yes, I can tell you that. It was rather unusual—and, I fear, irregular, though I have had very little leisure to think it over. I have a hobby for amateur taxidermy——” the doctor waved an airy hand at the cases crowding his little hall, cases full of stuffed birds and animals, staring glassily—“these are examples of my work.”

“Very fine—don't recollect ever seeing a finer piece than that one—the hawk hovering over the insides of a rabbit—very fine,” said Mr. Bunn.

“I was working rather late on a representation of a butcher bird, or shrike, when the man of whom you speak came. He was a queer-looking person, a Chinese dressed like a chauffeur. He was bleeding freely from a badly torn arm, and seemed to have lost a great deal of blood. He assured me that it had been caused by a motor-cycle accident—the arm had been pinched between the chain and the sprocket wheel in some way. Had the wound not been oily and dirty with motor-

grease I should have judged that it was caused by the teeth of a large dog.

"I dressed the man's wound and gave him leave to telephone to his employer—yourself, I presume. I indicated the telephone in the surgery and left him for a moment to glance at one of the shrike's wings which I had been stiffening when he came. It must have been some little time after—one gets absorbed in one's hobby—that I heard a slight crash from the surgery. I hurried there and found your man unconscious on the floor, bleeding from a furrowed wound along the forehead. It was very extraordinary. I replaced the receiver, and dressed this wound—a long, shallow cut which might have been serious if it had been a fraction deeper. He professed to be quite at a loss as to how the wound was inflicted on him. He thought that perhaps a poacher's stray bullet had come through the window and by chance struck him. He was rather dazed, and I did not press the poor fellow—a foreigner with apparently an extremely limited vocabulary. I took him down to our local inn, and arranged for them to take him in, instructing him to remain there, resting, for to-day. I saw him this morning. He was up. He was a man of extraordinary vitality. . . .

"It was a very puzzling, unaccountable business. Poachers do not usually use bullets on the countryside—and even if they did, they do not fire in the line of a lighted window. Yet that wound might easily have been made by a bullet. However, as the man is not seriously hurt, and seems to shrink from discussing the affair—and as it is to the last degree improbable that it was anything but a queer, inexplicable accident

—we harbour no desperate characters in a lonely place like this, you know——” the doctor smiled absent-mindedly—“ I have not pressed any inquiries. Between my professional work—which necessitates some long journeys in and about these downs—and my hobby, I have less time than one would suppose.”

“ Surely, surely,” agreed Mr. Bunn cordially. “ And you’ve already done more than many would do. I’m sure I’m very much obliged to you, and—with your permission—while my friend pays your fees, I would like to glance round the surgery just to satisfy myself that no bullet is lying about.”

“ Oh, certainly, certainly! This way.”

Ten minutes later the partners were in their car again, leaving the well-fee’d doctor to his taxidermy.

“ Old chap’s crazy on stuffing his birds,” said Smiler. “ That’s probably why he’s satisfied to spend his life in a half-horse-power place like this. No doubt he was thinking about his butcher bird all the time he was binding Sing Song’s head. But—somebody fired either a rifle, or more likely an automatic with a silencer on, at Sing Song last night. There’s a neat hole in the window—and, in line with it, from the garden outside, there’s a mark in the wall where the bullet buried itself. The doctor hasn’t noticed it, but if it had been six inches more to the right it would have flicked the brains—if any—out of that stuffed polecat on the shelf in his surgery. However, perhaps it’s as well he isn’t a Sherlock Holmes.”

He started the car, and was about to run back to the inn, when his eye caught something a little way down the narrow road leading out of the village.

"Ha, there *is* the lad, unless I miss my guess."

They got out, and leaving the car where it was, moved on down the road.

Perhaps a hundred yards on they rounded a slight bend.

Mr. Bunn had not missed his guess.

Sing Song was waiting there. He had seen the car, and signalled to his master, judging that Mr. Bunn would understand and come on.

"Well, Sing, my son, they've been pulling the rough stuff on you down here, hey? Who was it? Scanlon and Co., hey? They mighty near got you last night. Here, have a cigar, and just tell us what you know. I'm very pleased to see you, my lad, and I don't deny it. Now let's have your report."

CHAPTER XVIII

SING SONG may have seemed dazed to the dreamy old doctor, but there was nothing very dazed in his manner now. His owner-driver gathered that he had enjoyed a square meal at the village inn, and this, together with a long sleep, had worked quite a noticeable change in him. His face was no longer quite so drawn; and he appeared to regard his wounds as negligible, though his arm was stiff and his head still bound.

"Well, we'll take it as said that you hung on to Scanlon's car as far as here, Sing," said Mr. Bunn. "And it was very good work. Go on from that point."

The Chink went on from that point—for a period of perhaps five minutes. When he finished Mr. Bunn was smiling like a man who has found something well worth picking up.

It appeared that in the early evening of the following day Scanlon had reached Lowdale village, from which and in spite of the bad road—little more than a track—he had pushed on across the downs, slowly because of the road. At a respectable distance Sing Song followed him—on foot, for he had gleaned from a villager that the road spent itself on the open downland about two miles further on. He was able to keep Scanlon's car in sight all the way until it disappeared into the garage

or shed adjoining a big, rambling, stone-built, utterly desolate farm-house, tucked away in a fold of the downs.

It was, perhaps, nine o'clock before Scanlon reached the end of his journey with the tireless Chink dogging him, and from nine till past eleven Sing Song prowled about the place like a fox questing round a hen roost. There were several dogs, and Sing had to be careful.

He had seen Patricia Vandermonde. For this he had found it necessary to climb by means of the thickly growing ivy on the house walls up to a lighted window on the first floor—having first satisfied himself that there was no evidence of a lady held captive against her will downstairs. He had seen the heiress standing at a table, talking angrily with a man he believed to be one of those who had brought the impersonator on the midnight visit to Harchester Hall.

But before he had heard or seen much, a deep growl from the ground beneath him had attracted his attention. As he turned, a part of the window ledge had given way, and he had fallen to the ground. He had landed on his knees and instantly found himself fighting for his life with a huge Great Dane, which had either broken its chain or had been loosed for the night.

Had he not used his knife, the dog might have killed him. As it was, he had killed the dog, though not without some noise, and he had been compelled to retreat with a torn arm, pursued in the darkness by two men from the house.

He had managed to evade them, and so had reached the doctor's.

What had happened after that the partners already

knew. Sing Song, on his way into Winchester to telephone again, had seen their car come into the village, but, for fear of complications, he had not reported to them until after they left the doctor. He was quite certain that the man who fired at him through the window was one of those who had pursued him from the lonely house in the downs.

Mr. Bunn thought for a few moments.

"D'ye think they had any idea who you were, Sing?" he asked presently. "Did they recognise you as my servant?"

Sing Song admitted reluctantly that he had overheard enough, while lying hidden close to the two men when they were searching for him in the dark, to gather that they knew he looked like a Chinaman.

Mr. Bunn frowned.

"It looks to me as if we shall have to get busy rescuing the girl right away. They'll be moving on if they get suspicious. But why should they take the risk of firing at you puzzles me. If they'd killed you, my lad, it would only have complicated things for them. Their dodge would be to make another quiet flit—not to bring the police prying around. They must have an almighty grudge against you—a Chinaman—or be damned scared of you to try to shoot you——"

He broke off sharply, his heavy face lighting up.

"I've got it—and I've got it good! Sing, think now—did you overhear 'em say anything about a 'motor salesman' or a man called Whitney Vandermonde or Yellow Races? *Think, now!*"

Sing did not need to think long.

His black, beady eyes glittered with satisfaction as

he told them what his owner evidently considered good news.

He had heard one of the men say that they had evidently been followed by that Chinese-faced motor salesman Scanlon had mentioned.

Mr. Bunn was so charmed that he patted his retainer on the back.

"Ah, that's what I was after," he declared.

"Well, I'm glad you got it," said Fortworth. "And now you've got it I hope you understand it. For I am dead sure that I don't."

"I'll make it clear, Squire, now I've had a chance to turn my brain on it. It means, first of all, that Scanlon won't make a move because of Sing. Because he—they—believe that Sing is that motor salesman (little Yellow Eyes), whom MacHarrall suspects. And they believe that the motor salesman is wanting to kidnap Miss Vandermonde himself—on behalf of some Chinese gang in America—which is true. But they know that Yellow Eyes won't exactly apply to the police to help him kidnap the lady—and so they don't mind trying to slip a bullet into him. . . . So the position is that they are on to—they suspect—Yellow Eyes. But they don't know about us. And they aren't likely to disappear suddenly with the girl on account of any Chink—though if they knew that we, representing (in a manner of speaking) Law and Order, were close on their track, they would fade out as fast as their feet would let them. D'ye see? "

He turned.

"That's that! They're anchored there for the next day or two, believe me—which will give me time to

call in a few reinforcements. We've found Patricia Vandermonde—which is the important thing. Now we've got to consider how we'll get her out of their claws, but we've got time for that. The sooner we get back to Winchester the better."

"But why not get her right away now we're here? There are only three or four of them—and there's three of us. Let's get it over right away. I want to get my hands on something—or somebody," grumbled Fortworth truculently.

"Because they are a desperate crowd, playing for very big stakes. And also because it's daylight," explained Mr. Bunn. "If we three were fools enough to charge in now, probably two out of the three would be shot to pieces—and that's too short odds for the old man. Leave it to me. The girl is there when we want her—and so are the crooks. Strategy is now called for. I will supply it. We shall be back in Winchester nicely in time for dinner."

And so saying, he shepherded them back to the car.

Mr. Bunn's "strategy" and instincts were promptly justified. A telegram was awaiting him at the Carp Hotel, which he had made their headquarters. It was from Mr. Ferdinand Bloom, left in charge at Purdston Old Place, and ran as follows:—

"Telephone call for you from inquirer named Jeff Croucher received four p.m. this day. Croucher urgently requests you telephone him P.O. Lymington 902 earliest possible grave news.—Bloom"

Mr. Bunn read swiftly and became instantly active. He put in the trunk-call at once.

"Something wrong with Warrener, or *he* would have rung up, not Jeff," he said anxiously to Fortworth. "I'll risk a thousand that those two have run to earth those yellow devils holding the sham Patricia, and that young Warrener has butted in on them too soon. He's a fine lad, a brave lad, but he's a shade impulsive. Lymington come through yet, waiter? Just give the Exchange a hint to get a move on. . . . I don't like it, squire—I may be wrong, but I'm far from easy. *We* can't do much—we've got Patricia to rescue . . . but we don't want old Jeff cutting loose with six shots in each hand down there—or the whole game goes up. I've been banking on those two for reinforcements."

Then his call came through. Presently Mr. Bunn rejoined his partner in the smoking room.

"It's as I thought, Squire," he announced. "Warrener and his Jeff followed Yellow Eyes and two Chinks—apparently he's had reinforcements too—from their nest near Purdston to a house somewhere in the New Forest between Lymington and Brockenhurst. They had the girl with them—must have gone almost straight away from our cellar, thinking they'd left you and me for dead. This morning Warrener and Jeff called there to fetch the girl away. They're the sort that would call at Hades to fetch away anybody they considered should not be there, those two. Weir received them in a tolerably friendly way, but sprung some trap on them in a corridor leading to the room in which the lady is kept. Warrener was caught—he was in front—but Jeff got away. He left a bullet behind, in a useful place, he thinks. What puzzles me is how the man escaped the poison thorns. Any-

how, he did. He seems downhearted at the idea of not saving Warrener, but I pointed out that Jeff Croucher dead was a hundred per cent. less use to Warrener than Jeff Croucher alive. Cheered him up a little. It seems he's had a sort of parley with Yellow Eyes, and they've got a kind of sketchy understanding that as long as Jeff doesn't drag in the police no harm will come to Warrener or the girl. But at any sign of police attempt to raid the house, Yellow Eyes swears that the first two shots fired will be one for Warrener and one for the girl. So far, he seems to have kept quiet—for they all appear to think she is the real Patricia. It's a sort of deadlock."

He strolled across the room to a country map hanging on the wall, and roughly spaced off a distance.

"Call it thirty miles—maybe a trifle more—from here," he muttered.

"I'd promised myself a good look round Scanlon's place up on the down to-night, and it's edging along towards evening now. But I don't see what's wrong with your taking a run over to Lymington, seeing Jeff, and having a bit of an inspection of that snake's hole in the Forest. Hey? "

Fortworth sat up, his face quite good-humoured at the prospect of getting a free hand with Major Aldebaran Weir.

"Sure, sure," he said. "That's a masterpiece of an idea. I'll say that, yes, sir. I'll go—and as there's nothing like promptness in these matters, I'll be on my way."

But Mr. Bunn steadied his partner.

"Easy, man, easy—it's a scouting expedition you're

going, not a man-eating *séance*! Don't start anything over there you can't finish. You and Jeff will have to hold yourselves on the curb for a time—unless you want Warrener killed. The girl's safe enough at present. I'm trusting you to do a bit of good detective work on Yellow Eyes and his crowd—and I'm imploring you to keep clear of any rough work over there—for the time being only. Those poison-thorn thugs are too quick and watchful to be rushed."

Rather sulkily, but clearly impressed, Fortworth nodded.

"Good. You'll never regret this," continued Mr. Bunn. "All you and Jeff need do is to stand pat and keep your eyes open. I'm telephoning MacHarrall—a good man, that—to join you. Maybe I'll run over to-morrow morning, and we'll hold a bit of a council."

Fortworth agreed, stipulating however that he was to be let in on the affair pending at the house on the downs.

"Sure, you will," Mr. Bunn assured him. "Shouldn't dream of starting anything here without you. As I say, you mayn't be much on the brains department of this firm but in the action department you have old W. G. Action himself, the man who invented it, beaten from the bell onward. So go it—and don't forget to be careful. You're a queer, knobbly-tempered old he-buffalo, Squire. But I've kind of got used to you and I don't want a day's outing in Lymington Churchyard on your account."

Ten minutes later Fortworth was gone—driving himself, for Mr. Bunn needed Sing Song.

For a little the senior partner leaned back in his chair, mapping things out.

When, presently, he rose he was smiling like one very well satisfied. He then proceeded to telephone to MacHarrall to be at Lymington with his *confrères* early the next morning, where Mr. Bunn would meet them and "show them the way" to Miss Vandermonde.

Mr. Bunn then glanced at the clock, lit a cigar, and went to interview the head waiter and the *chef* about the possibilities of a really *recherché* little early dinner—"designed," as he frankly put it, "for a man who hasn't had the time to do good food justice for days past—days that seem like years."

And then he settled down to a nap.

"That young fellow, Drake, always fancied a game of bowls before going into action, I believe," he murmured with drowsy whimsicality to himself as he sank deeper and deeper in the upholstery of his chair and his slumber. "But the lad was wrong—even though he did beat the Armada. What you need before action is first, a bit of a snooze, second, dinner; then you can . . . face . . . a *herd* of armadilloes . . . if . . . called upon."

It was not without some justification that Mr. Bunn viewed the general situation with such tranquil complacency that he was able to spend an hour in slumberous anticipation of a really good dinner.

He had his quarry more or less where he wanted it. It suited him admirably to be within easy motor run of either of the strongholds of the two parties interested in retaining control over the liberties of Miss Vandermonde. He realised that probably the common

reason prompting both the yellow-eyed scoundrel Weir, and the secretarial traitor, Scanlon, when planning their retired "prisons" was the comparatively close proximity of Southampton. They were both handling schemes which were closely involved with certain American interests.

It was a sane idea to be within easy reach of fast liners. Either of them, from Winchester or Lymington, with a fast motor available, could be aboard any due-to-sail liner within a space almost of minutes. That, Mr. Bunn had long ago decided, was the factor influencing their choice of locality. And it made things easier for him.

He did not unduly hasten himself therefore, and it was not until past nine o'clock that he left the car he had hired behind a tumble-down shed just inside a neglected pasture, some distance from Lowdale village, and, with Sing Song, began to manoeuvre through the dusk that was darkening the downs, in the direction of the lonely house wherein Patricia Vandermonde was held.

It was a mild, mid-spring night, with a rising wind, and they moved quickly. For a man who had only been over the ground once—and that at night—Sing Song steered them amazingly well.

They circled the little village leaving it on their left.

Once the Chink stopped to point with a slight grin at an oblong of yellowish light shining from a window on the ground floor of one of the houses.

"Allee same window they shooting me by telephone, Master," he said.

"Hum! It's a pity the old doctor can't get the trick

of remembering to pull down his blinds," observed Mr. Bunn.

"Yes, please," agreed the Chink, steering past a thicket of thorny scrub.

A few minutes later he brought his owner out on a hill-side, and stopped, pointing down.

"Missee Vandelmon allee same in that house, please, master," he said softly

"Oh, that's the place, is it? Down there, hey? . . . Well, it's extremely well hidden," commented Mr. Bunn, absently, his eyes roving over the lighted house and its surroundings.

For a moment the burly adventurer and his yellow retainer stared down through the dusk in a calculating silence, their keen eyes picking up, and their quick wits registering, every point likely to be of the slightest use to them in their impending attempt to rescue the heiress.

"Well, come on, son. Let's scout up a bit nearer than this. We'll slant in from the north-east—wind's from the south-west, ain't it? We don't want every dog in the place advertising us before we've seen a thing," said Mr. Bunn; and they went forward down the hill-side, carefully, and not disdaining to use for cover the bits of scrub with which the slope was plentifully dotted.

Save for the lighted windows there was no sign that the house was occupied—and none at all that the occupants, with the sole exception of the prisoner, were bold and dangerous crooks. But nobody knew better than Mr. Bunn, himself a crook, though of a vastly different type from those in the house, that any

slip they made might bring them to an end of all crookedness. The men in that house were prepared to shoot at sight—they had proved that to Sing Song, as well as his master, on the previous evening.

They worked their way round to the western side of the house—on which side the track ran up to the entrance gates—and were settling down uncomfortably well inside a thorny growth of furze close to the gates, when a sudden harsh clamour of dogs broke out on the south side of the house.

"They've winded us!" said Mr. Bunn softly, flattening himself as well as his pronounced convexity would allow, and waited. A heavy automatic lay, black and sinister, in his hand.

Through the closely woven interstices of the furze he was able to see dimly the front of the house and the gates. They crouched in a ditch behind the furze, so that they were a little below the level of the road they were watching.

The outcry of the dogs lulled for a moment and Mr. Bunn's tight lips suddenly relaxed.



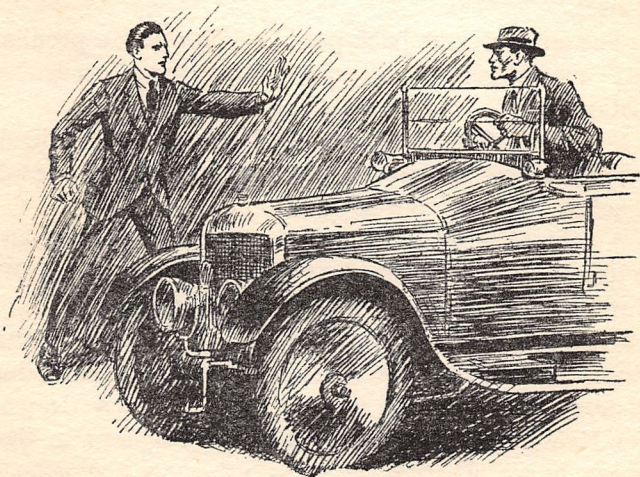
"STOP THERE!—KEEP

He had heard another sound, and he knew now that it was not on his and Sing's account that the dogs were barking.

Somebody was approaching the house in a motor—the old adventurer had caught the low, wailing sound from the gears of a car when it is running slowly on its lowest speed.

"A stranger! He's going slow and canny over the rough road!" Mr. Bunn told himself, peering through the dusk that was intensified and made hazy by the lattice of dense furze. But before the car could approach near enough to the gates for Mr. Bunn to note its driver it was halted abruptly. Two men, hatless, came out of the house, and faced down the road towards the car.

They stopped so close to Mr. Bunn that he could



YOUR DISTANCE—FOR YOUR OWN SAKE!"

hear quite plainly their sharp, low interchanges of comment.

"Who the devil is this?"

The voice was unfamiliar to Mr. Bunn. But it was Scanlon who answered.

"Leave him to me. If I think there's anything wrong I'll signal. There's only one man, anyway. Be ready with your pistol if I shout. I'm not easy about that infernal mystery-man of last night."

He broke off, but a second later his voice jarred again through the deepening darkness.

"Stop there! There is serious infectious illness in this house. Who are you? Keep your distance—for your own sake."

Mr. Bunn smiled grimly at the cunning device for keeping strange callers out of easy earshot of the house.

The answer came back pat in a voice with a peculiar, flat metallic ring—a voice Mr. Bunn recognised instantly.

"Right! This is Major Aldebaran Weir—a friend! I want a few minutes conversation with Mr. Arnold Scanlon—for both our sakes!"

A hint of acrid and sardonic mirth seemed to lurk in that strange, malevolent-sounding voice, and Mr. Bunn's body went suddenly as rigid as steel.

"Yellow Eyes again, by God!" he said within himself, amazed. He had been quite certain that Weir, at that moment, was many miles away deep in the New Forest, quietly perfecting his plans in that secret house whereat he held prisoners the woman

impersonating Patricia Vandermonde, and Larry Warrener.

"Little Yellow Eyes, hey?"

Gripping his big black "gun," Mr. Bunn craned forward to listen.

CHAPTER XIX

FOR a moment after the answer of the man with yellow eyes, Scanlon and his companion were silent.

It was evident that the name of Major Aldebaran Weir was strange to them. But they were prepared to deal with all comers. Scanlon's voice rapped back.

"I am Arnold Scanlon. What do you want to say? This is a house of sickness—and it is late."

"Not too late, I trust, for you to discuss briefly a matter which may be greatly to your benefit," returned the man in the motor. "A matter concerning Miss Vandermonde!"

"Ah! . . . are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Come up to the gates."

The gear clicked gently and the car crept level with the two men at the gate.

Mr. Bunn saw that each held a revolver in his hand.

"What do you wish to say concerning Miss Vandermonde?" said the secretary. The man with the yellow eyes laughed.

"You may put up your pistols and dispense with your suspicions. Like yourselves I am on the no-man's-land side of the law," he said, and paused a second. Then——

"You know America, I believe, Mr. Scanlon?" he asked, sharply.

"I do," snapped Scanlon.

"And it is just possible that you have heard of a Chinese organisation, known—in certain circles—as the Cobra Tong?"

"I have."

"I have the honour to come to you, this evening, Mr. Scanlon, as the representative of that august organisation, the Cobra Tong."

There was a bitter levity in the man's voice.

"What of that? Why do you desire to speak with me? Major Weir, you say you represent a Chinese Tong—but yours is hardly a Chinese name," returned Scanlon, his voice serious and somewhat lower.

"Fan Tzu Kang, if, like my colleagues of the Tong, you prefer it. I have—on behalf of the Cobra Tong—to make a proposal to you, Mr. Scanlon."

"What is your proposal?"

"Briefly—that we exchange prisoners!"

Mr. Bunn heard Scanlon's gasp of astonishment.

"Exchange prisoners! Then you are the man who has taken away Miss Vandermonde?" he said.

"Pardon me, no. *You* are that man! *I* am the man who has taken prisoner the lady whom you trained so perfectly to impersonate Miss Vandermonde! That is regrettable—the Cobra Tong do not need the false Miss Vandermonde. But for the real one—the niece of Whitney Vandermonde—the need of the Tong is so vitally urgent that only a very foolish, or very ignorant, man would frustrate its plans to secure her. Are you following me, Mr. Scanlon?"

The arm of the secretary moved forward.

Instantly the voice of the man with yellow eyes renewed itself menacingly.

"It would be an act of the gravest folly to shoot, Mr. Scanlon. I will explain why in very few words. There is a charming little country house at Los Angeles, California. Do you know Los Angeles, Mr. Scanlon? Do you know a certain little house there where a woman—a very beautiful woman—in her leisure reads and re-reads letters from the husband who, as she loves to boast to her friends, is a trusted and highly-paid confidential secretary to the great Whitney Vandermonde? Your house, your wife, my friend—to whom you hope, no doubt, to return some day, immensely wealthy . . . do I make myself explicit, Mr. Scanlon?"

There was no answer, but Scanlon's pistol hand had fallen again.

"If I do not return safely to my own house to-night, Mr. Scanlon, certain associates of mine will cable to-morrow to the San Francisco branch of the Cobra brotherhood to make reprisals upon that charming, if somewhat hard, lady, in the delightful little house at Los Angeles. Do you understand?"

Like Mr. Bunn, the Cobra man evidently caught the oath which Scanlon partly failed to check.

"Ah, I see—I hear—that you understand," came the smooth, malignant voice through the dusk. "That is good, for I speak the bare truth. Shoot me to-night—and nothing can save your people from the Cobra. I tell you that in warning. . . . Are you ready now to talk business, Mr. Scanlon?"

"What do you want?" asked the secretary. There was the faintest hint of a tremor in his voice.

"To exchange prisoners . . . you see, the lady I hold—Miss Lora Dubars—has yielded to her fears—and certain persuasions of mine—and has confessed to me her identity and your plot. She, too, you see, is aware of the power of the Tong."

"She has confessed!" cried Scanlon.

"Indeed, yes. And told me, moreover, where I might find you. Why should she not? There need be no clashing of our different interests. Think, my friend. Or, better still, listen to me. I will explain—perhaps your thoughts are a little confused just now. You hold Miss Vandermonde, whom you do not need, but whom I need badly. I hold Miss Lora Dubars, her impersonator, whom I do not need, but whom you need badly. Without Miss Vandermonde *my* plans cannot progress. Without Miss Dubars *your* plans cannot progress. Therefore, I propose an exchange."

"I see. Let me think," muttered Scanlon, low—but not so low that Mr. Bunn missed it.

"Do, but before you decide, let me remind you that—thanks again to my happy gift for persuasion—Miss Dubars has put me in possession of the whole of your very ingenious little plot."

The voice dropped until it was little more than an evil whisper.

"And there would have to be a slight concession on your part. Mr. Whitney Vandermonde must not be killed until after he has himself killed the Anti-Yellow Bill, which he is pressing forward in the United States. That may be a matter of a few weeks. When that

Bill is killed, we don't care how soon you or your little band of conspirators kill Whitney Vandermonde. And if, after Vandermonde is dead, you desire his heiress, Patricia Vandermonde, whom we shall be holding, quietly disposed of, so that the way of your impersonator, Miss Dubars, to the inheritance should be clear, I have no doubt that it can be arranged."

"Not so loud, man——"

"Who is there to hear on this breezy, open downland? I was but whispering—your conscience is a microphone," replied the low, mocking voice. "Come then—do you agree?"

Scanlon began to whisper furiously with his companion.

The man with yellow eyes waited. Then Scanlon's whisper rose again.

"Look here, there are too many in this business," he said nervously. "It's dangerous. How many of your people this side are in it?"

"One—that is myself. My men act blindly on my orders. They strike because they are told to strike—without knowing why, without seeking to know," lied the Cobra man, and laughed suddenly.

"There were two others—two fat, foolish men of Purdston, who suspected the truth. One Wilton Flood, an ox-like person whose brains were mainly concerned with his stomach—and his friend, one Black, a senseless, choleric fool somewhat resembling a bear, both in manner and appearance. These—have been attended to. They have become utterly negligible. There is nothing to fear from them—unless you are a believer in ghosts."

"They are dead!"

There was amazement, and a touch of fear in Scanlon's voice.

"Certainly. I saw to that myself."

"They were only a couple of blundering fools, anyway," said Scanlon. "Now—about the exchange. We agree. We are each in the power of the other—and we have to play fair. It is understood that you notify us when the Vandermonde Bill is killed, and that you never release the girl Patricia in any circumstances; that when you have finished negotiations with Vandermonde you let me know so that I and her personal guards may cable him to the effect that the girl has returned safely and unhurt to Harchester Hall—I will arrange that with Dubars; that, immediately after the death of Vandermonde, you—dispose of—the girl, and finally, that the Tong clearly undertakes to leave the—the little house and household at Los Angeles in peace! Do you agree? Do you swear that?"

"I agree—I swear." The evil voice vibrated in the gloom.

"Good! How shall we arrange the exchange?"

"That will be simple. I shall bring the girl Dubars here to this spot at eleven o'clock to-morrow night. Be ready with Miss Vandermonde—I suggest a whiff of chloroform—to keep her quiet. I shall leave Dubars—and take away the Vandermonde. It is very simple!"

"Very well—eleven o'clock!"

"Good. That is all, I think. You have chosen wisely, Mr. Scanlon."

The listeners heard the cough of the motor-engine suddenly started to life, and then the man turned round.

"You will be careful with the chloroform, of course . . . *Au revoir!*"

The red tail-light receded through the gloom. The two scoundrels at the gate hung there for a moment watching it talking in low muttering whispers, then went into the house.

For a little, Mr. Bunn remained motionless where he was. Then he touched Sing Song, and slowly, with infinite patience and silence, they wormed their way clear of the furze-patch and back round the north side of the house, to the windward of the dogs, by the way they had come.

Not till they had gained the hill-side from which they had reconnoitred did the old adventurer speak. It was too dark then to read his expression but his voice was sufficient guide to Sing Song to satisfy the Chink that his owner was still very much "at the wheel."

"We've been up against some bad bunches, Sing, you and I, in our time, hey?" said Mr. Bunn in an oddly quiet voice, "but this is the worst yet. Deliberate, cold-blooded murderers, these men, my son. By God! They've got to deal with *us* yet. Hey? . . . That poor girl——"

He was staring down at the lighted house, his heavy head thrust forward.

"They're out of their times—they don't belong to these days. Either they're a hundred years ahead of the times or three hundred years behind—— Anybody

would be entitled to shoot them at sight—like dogs, hey? Like mad dogs——”

He turned.

“Come on, Sing. We’ve got to be exact now—exact to a hair’s-breadth. No mistakes—not a shadow of a mistake . . . at eleven o’clock to-morrow night we have to be *there*—in force, my lad. *You* will have to be on this hill-side, under cover, at dawn. *This* house must be watched all day to-morrow.”

They went quickly across the downs, Mr. Bunn muttering to himself all the way.

Never had the Chink seen him so moved, so bitter—or so grim.

CHAPTER XX

FOR a full hour after reaching the hotel, Mr. Bunn sat in silence, pondering and planning. Thanks to the sheer, cold-blooded over-confidence of the man Weir, to Scanlon's evident fear of the power of the San Francisco branch of the Cobra Tong, and to his own and Sing Song's useful, if lucky, scouting, he had the whole diabolical plot against Whitney Vandermonde clear in his mind. His task now was to arrange a counter-move which would destroy the whole fabric of the appalling scheme so cunningly arranged by the millionaire's enemies.

He told himself frankly that it would need all his gifts to bring the Vandermonde affair to a triumphant conclusion of the kind in which he specialised.

For the first time within his memory, he wavered for a moment over the question of inviting the police—Scotland Yard—to take a hand in the matter. And when he abandoned this novel idea, it was as much because he could not feel certain that the police would handle the case with the crispness which he regarded as highly necessary, as because of the undoubted risk to himself and his partner, which too close contact with the police must bring.

"No, we'll see this through on our own," he told himself, and muttered the names of those he could

rely upon to aid him. "Let's look now—there's myself, Fortworth, Sing Song, Jeff Croucher, MacHarrall and that tough-looking chauffeur who was driving Miss Vandermonde's car. That's six hardish propositions. It's a pity about Warrener—a lad who can shoot like Larry has got a right to be in a scramble like this. And if it were a few days later, there's my brother Tony—polished, polite, and smooth as honey, but some bear-cat in a fight.

"Now, how many have we against us? Scanlon and his pair of scoundrels, that's three, and then there will be Yellow Eyes and one, if not two, of his Cobras—that'll be, say six. Also this she-lynx, Dubars, and probably that treacherous wild-cat who decoyed Miss Patricia into the trap. That's six men and two women—every solitary one of them is ready to kill as a viper to strike. I don't pretend to like it. But——" his eyes glared greenly at the fire and his heavy jaw was like a jutting stone—"I am going through with it! By all the idols of China, if any, I am going to get little Yellow Eyes and Scanlon—and I'm going to save that American girl and her father! And I don't give a damn whether we make a pocketful o' money out of it—or a skinful of poison-thorns. No, sir! It's a matter of personal pride!"

He had sat up, but suddenly he relaxed, leaning back again.

"Why—those devils got my goat!" he said, rather naïvely, a little astonished at the sudden surge of real and reckless rage which had boiled up within him.

"It's because I liked the look of the little dame, Patricia, I suppose—not so little, either——" he mused.

"I liked her eyes—nice straight-looking eyes. And her manner—a bit imperious perhaps, but I should be imperious myself if I had an Uncle Whitney with fifty millions—and a big percentage of it ear-marked for mine! A nice girl—with not so many of those damned airs and graces as some—and no frills on—at least, not noticeable frills—ha-ha! Well, well, I must keep my temper. Go steady. I'd better have a whisky-and-soda!"

He mixed his medicine for steadiness, forced himself without difficulty to swallow it, and was thinking about another when Fortworth strode in.

"Ha, can't leave it alone, I see," said the junior partner jocularly, and proceeded to mix a stiff one for himself, smiling as he did so.

Mr. Bunn stared, honestly amazed at the phenomenon of a jocular tone and a smiling face from Fortworth—and observed that it was practically the first liquid nourishment which had passed his lips that day.

"Oh, well, what if it was?" replied Fortworth. "You're entitled to celebrate—though you may not know it. The fact is, I've just straightened out that little difficulty over at Lymington."

"Straightened?"

"Got Larry Warrener out of the hands of that yellow-eyed blackguard's clutches," said Fortworth airily. "Jeff and I went to it at once. I found him pretty badly upset—stopping at one of those Forest Hotels just outside Lymington. He gave me the facts, I thought it over quick, mapped out a plan, and we got a move on. We did not use any of the theory stuff—half a pint of practice is worth a gallon of theory any

day, to my mind—and we went to it at once. Weir has got hold of a very secluded, lonely house right in the Forest, some miles from Lymington. We nipped across there, Jeff and I. And we got busy. He's some wolf, is Jeff Croucher, believe me. There were two Chinks in charge, as far as we could make out—and I'm afraid Jeff winged one pretty badly. But that lad, Larry, is no Rip van Winkle when it comes to action. He seems to have been lying—roped up—in a first-floor room expecting something like an attempt at a rescue. Anyway, he had got enough of his legs free to drag across to the window and smash it, while we kept the Chinks busy on our side.

“Then he sawed the cord off his arms and wrists with the points of broken glass left in the frame—cut himself pretty badly in the hurry—and wrenched back the window bars with a thick fir pole I passed up.

“It was a very smart bit of work. The Chinks spent a little too long on the other side of the house trying for Jeff with their thorns—for they thought of Larry too late to stop him. It was a close call though—I found a thorn through my hat when we got back into the trees.

“Larry had been used pretty wickedly. He had been drugged, tied up, man-handled and he was nearly all in. But he's got the heart of a tiger when he's roused, that lad. Nothing would have stopped him trying to get the girl out—but one thing. And that was the news that she wasn't Miss Vandermonde but her impersonator! Lord, but that livened up those two! They wanted to know where the real Patricia

was. I explained that you were keeping a fatherly eye on her elsewhere.

"I guess you made a hit with them, for it seemed to take a load off their minds. I guaranteed that Patricia was safe for the time being, and I guess that put the finishing touch on Larry, for he dropped like a log. It seems he had cut a biggish vein, and he had lost a lot of blood, and he was still pretty sick from some drug they had squirted into him, to keep him quiet earlier.

"So we put him to bed, and I left him to Jeff and pulled out for here—and here I am! And before you make any observation, I want to say that to my mind it was a very fine bit of work—quick, smart, clean, and handled in masterly fashion—*by me!* What's your opinion?"

"Squire!" said Mr. Bunn. "I've always maintained—and always shall—that when it comes to good, solid Direct Action—Body Work as distinct from Brain Work—no polar bear that every bit his way through icebergs to get at what he wanted could beat you! You have pulled off a sweet bit of work in style. I congratulate you—and I'm proud to be associated with you! I have said before—and I care not who hears me repeat myself—that for a genuine, ten-taloned, green-eyed, two-horned, fighting hippopotamus, you are in a class by yourself!"

Fortworth purred. He was not sufficiently familiar with compliments to notice that perhaps his partner's encomiums were a shade excessive, and, anyway, he liked things strong.

He was an extremely pleased man.

So, for that matter, was Mr. Bunn.

Fortworth's news not only readjusted the balance of force, it altered the situation very materially in the matter of hostages. The man with the yellow eyes and Scanlon had been in a stronger position than possibly they had guessed when, between them, they had held both Patricia Vandermonde and Larry Warrenner. These two, Mr. Bunn was practically certain, loved each other even though, for some reason unknown to him, they seemed not to have been "on visiting terms"—some misunderstanding, or little quarrel, probably—and though neither of the gangs appeared to have realised it, their opportunities of playing one of the prisoners off against the other had been plentiful and likely to be fruitful.

Thanks however to the fierce energy of Fortworth and the grim old Westerner, Jeff Croucher, all possibility of this was obviated.

The rescue of Larry, even though it found him in no real condition to join in the impending bitter fight for Patricia on the following night, was a fine stroke.

Then Mr. Bunn related his own discoveries to his surprised but greedily attentive partner, and the two settled down to a minute examination of a plan of campaign. . . .

At eight o'clock precisely on the following morning Mr. Bunn woke to one of the busiest days of his life.

"You dlinkee tea, please, master," wheedled Sing Song, insinuating his owner's first morning draught before his notice with an air intended to convey an impression that he had brought at least a tray of pearls.

"Humph!" said Mr. Bunn, very ungratefully. Sing

Song smiled patiently and softly repeated a little chant of praise concerning the tea.

Mr. Bunn sat up, eyeing everything with black disfavour. It had been very late before the partners had got their order of battle set out to their own satisfaction, and they had not gone to bed until the small hours.

"Tea, hey? Humph! Pass me my Kruschen salts, son, first. I've got to have a head on me to-day as clear as the inside of a new laid balloon. As much as will go on a shilling to-day, my lad. . . . That's better. Now let me have a look at that tea. Good!"

He stared at Sing Song, who, in spite of his still bandaged head, was looking as bright and expectant as a terrier on the brink of a day's good ratting.

"Busy day before us, boy," said Mr. Bunn.

"Yes, please, master."

"Might all be ghosts before midnight!" continued the old adventurer cheerfully.

"Yes, please, master."

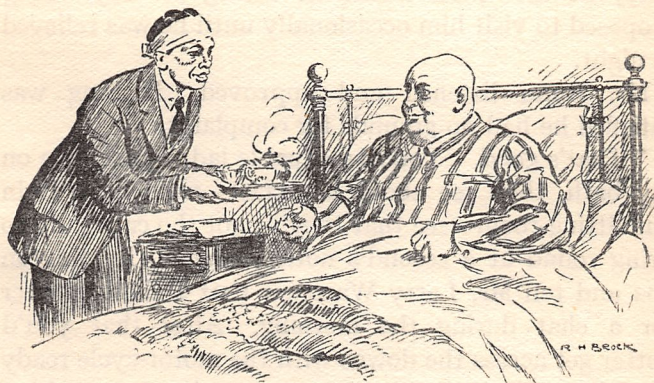
"Still, we'll do our best, hey, son? And we may as well start now," he frowned.

"What about keeping an eye on that house to-day? It ought to be done—but I don't see how I can spare you."

Sing spoke volubly. It seemed that he had foreseen this difficulty and late on the night before had ventured to take steps to provide for it. He had run over to Southampton on his motor-cycle with the intention of hunting up in that port of queer people a compatriot of his own—a man he could trust absolutely to take up a position at dawn behind cover, with a pair of field-

glasses and there remain watching until relieved. He had been more fortunate than he expected, for he had found not merely a Chinaman, but one who was an acquaintance—and whose ancestors had been personal “pals” (so to express it) with the ancestors of Sing.

“I didn’t know you had any ancestors, Sing,” observed Mr. Bunn. “Go on.”



“TEA, HEY? HUMPH!”

This man, oddly named Ouan (which roughly, in English means “curious object”)—upon whose integrity Sing was willing to stake his life, having just been abruptly discharged from a minor stewardship on account of the curious and inexplicably stubborn attitude of the captain towards the question of opium smuggling, was glad to lease himself body and soul to Mr. Bunn for a day on terms so reasonable that Sing had promptly engaged him, bumped him violently back to Winchester on the luggage grid of the motor-

cycle, fed him, and, having sworn him to blind and utter loyalty by numerous blood-curdling Chinese oaths, had lent him Mr. Bunn's field-glasses and at the very first peep of dawn had personally installed him in the middle of a thick and prickly gorse-bush on the downs overlooking the house, with the severest instructions to note everything that happened, and everyone who came and went during the day. Sing proposed to visit him occasionally until he was relieved at night.

Mr. Bunn listened and approved. If Sing was satisfied he had no grounds for complaint.

"That's good. You're a capable lad. Just turn on my bath, then see about breakfast—we'll have it in our sitting-room—see that they've got the car ready to bring round at a second's notice, ring up Lymington 902 and tell Mr. Larry Warrener that I shall be over for a chat during the morning. After that you'd better get across the downs with the motor-cycle ready to follow Scanlon if your sentry signals anything doing."

And Mr. Bunn crawled out of bed, yawned fearfully, pulled himself together and paddled off to the bathroom.

But he continued faster than he started, for shortly after ten o'clock he and his partner were alighting from their car outside the Forest Glen Hotel near Lymington—where quite a little company received them. To wit, Larry Warrener, pale but resolutely active, Jeff Croucher, MacHarrall, the grim-featured chauffeur-detective, Yarrow, who had driven Miss Vandermonde's car, and a silent, burly man Cassidy, also a detective,

whose passion for gardening had made the post of camouflaged head gardener at Harchester Hall particularly appropriate.

They withdrew in a body to the big room which Warrener had reserved. There Mr. Bunn addressed them.

"In an affair like to-night's business promises to be, there is only room for one leader," he stated. "And I may as well say now that the only man here present with the necessary qualifications to be the *pro tem.* leader is myself. I want to get this point right before we begin this council—as you may say."

He stared searchingly round at them all with his hard, green-flint eyes.

"I don't ask you to decide in a hurry or off-hand—but I don't want you to delay. We've all got together for the same purpose—to get Miss Patricia Vandermonde out of the grip of the crafty, dangerous crook who's holding her. And if we fail you can take it from me that it's a practical certainty that within a very short period Whitney Vandermonde will be assassinated, and his niece Patricia disposed of—murdered, to be frank about it. We have got to win out to-night. *Got* to, you understand. There's no margin—not a half-inch of it. . . . And that's why we've got to start with a clear understanding. Now, you're Americans, and I know that the man who starts in to lead Americans has got to produce the goods—he's got to show that he's the round peg in the circular hole. I'll undertake to do that—if I fail, I'll give you leave to depose me and kick me out. You'll do that, anyway, with or without leave—if I fail.

And rightly so. So, what about it? Am I the right man—or am I not? I ought to be and I'll prove it."

He told them enough of the actual facts of the kidnapping to convince them.

They were amazed men.

But they were all clever men, too—and without hesitation they elected him.

"Good. You've done the sound thing, boys. We'll work together!" Mr. Bunn beat his huge fist gently on the table before him. "I tell you I have got Scanlon's game weighed, measured and packed. But we've got to be careful. It's going to be a fight—and it may be a wicked fight. I propose to put a plan before you, and I want you to tell me just what you think about it."

They agreed swiftly.

"Some of you boys are detectives—on private contract with Whitney Vandermonde certainly, but detectives. And it's reasonable and natural that about the first question that flashes into your minds is, 'What about making a sure thing of this, and calling in Scotland Yard or the local police?' It seems the obvious and simple thing to do. But it ain't. For one thing, it's probably too short notice to get the best men of Scotland Yard; and for another, it isn't going to please the Vandermondes to provide the newspapers with ten days' sensation—for where the police go the reporters follow. Miss Vandermonde does not want the task of explaining how it was she was simple enough——" Mr. Bunn caught Larry Warrenner's eye and substituted—"ingenuous enough, I should say, to be caught on the golf-course by that trick; we know Whitney Vandermonde doesn't want to have the world advised that he

came near to having to choose between his niece's life and his Anti-Yellow Bill, or to have everybody informed that his own trusted secretary was a crook, or to let every crook in the world see that kidnapping his niece might be a good way of influencing his political opinions and his bank-book; you, Mac, and your assistants don't want it made universally public that you had the girl you were paid to guard whipped out from under your very eyes without your noticing it; and you, Mr. Warrenner, and Jeff, have only got to cast your minds back to our first meeting to decide that the police aren't called for vociferously—eh? ”

Unanimously they agreed with the worldly logic of the old rascal.

He heaved a sigh of relief.

“ Good. We are going to work together like the gear wheels in a gear box,” he said.

“ We've got to take these scoundrels alive,” he continued. “ For there are bigger scoundrels behind them, and when they are extradited, as they have got to be, or some pretext or other, it will be up to your police to extract the names of the bigger fish. Is that agreed? ”

It was.

“ Can it be done—the extradition? ”

“ Sure! I'll guarantee that.” It was MacHarrall who spoke.

“ Fine,” said Mr. Bunn. “ Now we can get ahead.”

They did so.

An hour later the lean, permanently sun-browned and weather-dried Mr. Jeff Croucher sauntered forth from the hotel, as it might be to stroll awhile in the sylvan glens of the New Forest. He went alone, silently, as

was his custom, holding no converse with any who witnessed his leisurely departure. And in the heart of Mr. Croucher was the fixed intention of abiding patiently behind cover within range of the house in the woods until such time as the unwounded Cobra Tong Chink still remaining in the house incautiously exposed any non-vital part of his anatomy in the course of his duties towards his yellow-eyed master.

It was no part of worthy Mr. Croucher's plans to extinguish the vital spark within the carcase of the aforesaid Chink. But it was unalterably his intention to render the yellow man sufficiently unfit to issue forth that night with his poisoned thorns. Mr. Bunn had decreed—and his little brigade had agreed—that as probably this Chink was the only one left with these deadly little weapons, he must be deprived of any chance of using them.

Jeff estimated that this happy result could be achieved by the outlay of one cartridge. He was not a man who missed to any marked extent things which he desired to hit. . . .

Precisely half-an-hour later Mr. Bunn and his company caught a faint, far-off sound—such as is made by a poacher's gun fired some distance away in the woods—and a few minutes afterwards Mr. Croucher reappeared, strolling calmly, studying with a certain interest a wild flower which he had seemed to have gathered for himself during his walk.

"Through the right shoulder joint," he observed quietly, to nobody in particular as he joined the group by the big Rolls Royce.

"Good work," said Mr. Bunn, beaming all round. "And now we'll set the deadfall on the downs!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE rest of that day was all organisation and what Mr. Bunn described variously as "tactics," "generalship," or "doping it out," according to his mood at the moment.

But whatever his description of his work may have been, the manœuvres themselves were undeniably thorough, and when at the coming of dusk the old adventurer and his partner moved silently across the downs towards the point above the lonely house where Sing Song, having duly relieved Ouan, kept watch, both of them had the satisfying knowledge that, closing in through the dusk from every side, converging on the house as the spokes of a wheel converge upon the hub, were the units of the little company which, for this night, had voluntarily put itself under his command.

"I guess I've thought of everything, hey, Squire?" muttered Mr. Bunn as they went. "Every minute makes it harder for anything or anybody to break through the cordon."

He peered close at his wrist-watch. "Another two hours to wait yet," he said.

He stopped.

"Listen!"

The two halted.

Except for the low drone of the wind, which was rarely absent from this wide rolling countryside, the downs were silent.

A few lights, pale yet in the steely twilight, showed in the village, but the window of the doctor's surgery, which Mr. Bunn had come to regard as a sort of landmark, was lightless.

Presently, all being well, that window would suddenly throw out a red-gold beam of light; but not till the motor, in which the man with the yellow eyes was bringing the impersonator Dubars to Scanlon, had passed.

Down in a front room of the doctor's house, Larry Warrener was watching. He had accepted this comparatively minor post with profound distaste. It was his urgent desire to be in the thick of things at the house, but his brief captivity in the New Forest House had levied heavy toll upon him. He had been stunned savagely, narrowly escaping fracture, deeply and dangerously drugged, and he had lost a great deal of blood from his glass-torn wrists. Colonel-in-Chief Bunn had had his little regiment, and particularly Mr. Jeff Croucher, solidly behind him when he posted Larry in the doctor's house to signal the car, and refused to let him accompany the others.

They reached the place in the bushes where Sing crouched, eyeing the house.

"All right, Sing? Nobody coming or going down there? Nothing out of the way? . . . Good! You know your orders, hey? Hang on here till the motor is at the house, then come down to us at the half-way mark just as fast as you can travel. Got that?"

"Yes, please, master, can do," answered the Chink.

The partners turned and made their way down the slope to a spot some distance above the track, midway between the village and Scanlon's house, and settled down behind a thin screen of gorse to wait.

They said little for the next hour. Fortworth was never a talkative man in his sunniest moods, and when strung up or excited he was apt to be as sullenly mute as a hungry bear hunting for something eatable.

And Mr. Bunn appeared to be too rapt in calculations as to the probable movements and methods of the man Weir to talk much. He muttered a little from time to time.

"He won't go back to the Forest with the girl? But he can only get back to the main road by the track we're watching. . . . The thing is, has he got reinforcements?"

"Getting damned dark!" observed Fortworth.

"There'll be a bit of a moon in half an hour," said Mr. Bunn.

Presently one of the dogs at the distant house began to bark, and Mr. Bunn scowled.

"Now what clumsy fool has given himself away?" he grumbled, listening intently.

But the barking died away again, and his face cleared. He peered at his wrist-watch.

"Half-past ten!" he said. "The lights are all out in the village. Yellow Eyes may be along any minute—he'll be early rather than late, if I know him."

The minutes stole past.

Fortworth was staring through a pair of night binoculars at the lonely house.

"There are more lights started at the upstairs windows," he said. "They're getting ready for visitors."

Fortworth began to mutter.

"Hell! I don't care about this. We ought to have rushed the place and received Yellow Eyes ourselves—suppose they overdo the chloroform?"

"They won't. Her life is too valuable to them, I tell you," said Mr. Bunn. "Anything could happen to her in a rush; but as it is, we shall just pick her up and put her in Larry's arms as neatly as putting a baby to bed. We've got to get the gang as well as save the girl."

He was glaring urgently towards the village.

"Quarter to eleven," he muttered presently. "Lord, that fifteen minutes was an hour. Come on, Yellow Eyes!"

The wan light of a rising moon began to thin the darkness as they waited tensely.

"Blinds down! They're cautious to-night!" reported Fortworth.

"They'll need to be, damn them!" grated Mr. Bunn. His nerves were taut.

"Five minutes——"

Then, far away to the left, a pale, oblong radiance painted itself suddenly on the darkness at the back of the doctor's house—Larry Warrenner had lighted the signal lamp. They waited, staring. The light went out for a moment, then reappeared and remained.

"He's coming! Sharp to the minute, by God! And alone—Larry blacked her out once only. Alone! With the girl. Hark!"

They listened.

Faintly, across the wind, the low sound of the car came to them, and a moment later the subdued glow of the dimmed lights went swimming along the rough road towards the house of the conspirators.

"There he goes!" said Mr. Bunn, with a curious under-note of excitement and triumph in his low voice.

The lights died out along the track.

"All right. Come on!"

They rose and hurried down the slope to the roadway. Moving obliquely across the face of the slope a shadow joined them—Sing Song.

"You seeing, please, master——?"

"Yes. We marked him go by," returned Mr. Bunn to the darker shadow behind a clump of thorn-bush at the track-side. "Quick now—if I know him, Yellow Eyes isn't going to hang about long."

He picked up a rail—one of several they had placed in readiness behind a bush in the early evening—and moved to the middle of the road, the others following him, Fortworth with a rail and a support, Sing Song with two supports.

"A bit further round the bend—we don't want him slowing down too soon. He thinks quick when he starts thinking—and shoots quicker than that! . . . Here—put 'em up here!"

Working quickly, in less than three minutes, the trio had erected right across the road a light barrier of rails, and a minute later they had hung to the rails two small, red-glazed lanterns, lighted.

Mr. Bunn stepped back to survey the work.

"Yes," he approved. "It'll do. Road stopped. That's all it's intended to convey. Defy any man with brains to rush through that until he's satisfied that nothing has happened to the roadway since he came this way before. It'll puzzle Yellow Eyes—for a few seconds, anyway. Thanks to the bend he won't see the red lights till he's right on top of them—and he'll stop by instinct."

He stepped backwards, his eyes on the lights until they disappeared behind the curve of the road.

"He will be stealing along here without thinking of the road," calculated the crafty old adventurer, as he ran forward a few yards and halted sharply; "here he will suddenly see the red lights and the outline of the rails, and stop instinctively—he'll be going fairly slow—allow him a yard-and-half to stop—no, two yards——" Mr. Bunn stepped forward two yards—"here. He will be at a standstill here." He glanced to each side of the road and chuckled. On the right was a bit of scrub bordering the road, large enough to cover a man in daylight, more than enough at night.

The other side of the road immediately opposite was bare, but some fifteen yards back was a dense bit of cover. Mr. Bunn pondered it.

"Sing's quicker on his feet than I am. He can take that cover and follow the car up. What's a few yards to him? I'll take the bit opposite where the car will stop, and the squire can lie doggo a few yards beyond the rail—in case Weir takes a chance. That'll do it."

Hastily he posted his companions with detailed instructions.

"Remember, Squire, if he ever reaches you it will be because he's past us—and if he gets past you he's gone. I'm putting you past the red lights as extra long-stop," said Mr. Bunn urgently to his partner.

"Make your mind easy," growled Fortworth. "He won't get past me."

"I know it. . . . If you have to shoot, mind the girl."

"Sure, sure," muttered the "extra long-stop" irritably. "I understand."

"Right. Keep covered till you hear the car stop. Then you can sail in as quick as you like. . . . Come on, Sing."

He posted the Chink.

"As the car passes you, son, slide out and follow it for the few yards it'll run until it stops at the red lights. I shall be there, busy with Yellow Eyes. There may be more than one. Sail right in, boy, like a little wild-cat. But, remember this. If I am put out—don't intend to be—but *if* I am—your job is to take the girl—she'll be unconscious—and get her to Mr. Warrener at the doctor's house at all costs. Never mind about me or any single thing except the girl. Have you got that, son? Keep your mind on that. The girl goes to Mr. Warrener—and if anybody tries to get her from you, I'm giving you leave to shoot or use your knife on them, or your teeth, or any damn Chinese speciality you know. The girl goes to Mr. Warrener. I've promised it. Got that?"

The eyes of the Chink gleamed red in the rays of the lanterns.

"Yes, please, master—can do."

"Then do so—if necessary. You'd better get to your cover."

Sing disappeared, cat-silent. Mr. Bunn took up his own post, and the silence shut down again.

A few moments later a distant chorus of deep barking broke out—died away.

Mr. Bunn, motionless behind his cover, grinned a thin, hard-lipped grin.

"He's reached the house! Lord, but he's in the jaws of the rat-trap now!"

He began to whisper tensely to himself, picturing, timing what was taking place at the lonely house—under the eyes of MacHarrall, Jeff Croucher, Yarrow and Cassidy, lurking in ambush close by.

"He should be—reversing the car . . . turning . . . now, he's brought her close up to the gate . . . The girl Dubars is getting out—slipping into the house. Yellow Eyes stands by the car . . . Hey? That's about it!—"

"Now . . . here's Scanlon—coming out. Stares at Dubars—makes sure it *is* her—cunning devil would do that . . . now . . . here they come . . . carrying Patricia Vandermonde . . . two of them . . . the other two women staring . . . whispering . . . out of the door . . . easy, now . . . out to the car . . . not too fast . . . poor soul . . . damned murderers . . . Yellow Eyes studies her . . . makes sure white face *is* Patricia's—flashlight, probably . . . yes . . . satisfied—"

"Now . . . should be putting her in the car . . . back of the car . . . corner . . . unconscious . . . rugs . . . cushions, hey? . . . propping her up . . .

damn them . . . *No!* They wouldn't risk her alone unconscious in the back of car . . . somebody else . . . there'll be two men returning . . . one besides Yellow Eyes . . . to look after her——"

He halted his taut muttering for a few seconds.

"Now . . . surely . . . they're ready . . . Few words with Scanlon . . . Right . . . starting . . . *On their way . . . coming!*"

He listened intently.

A few seconds later, faintly, against the wind, Mr. Bunn caught the sound of two or three barks—as of dogs that sometimes bark idly or in excitement, when guests are leaving.

"Not so far wrong—the old man," he said to himself, settled comfortably on his feet for his rush, and released the safety-catch of his automatic.

He stared down the track, his mind, his whole imagination travelling alongside the car as it picked up speed.

"*Now!*" he said, very low, after a little space. He was a trifle too soon—but no more than a trifle.

Thirty seconds after he had spoken, the pale glare of the head-lights stabbed the darkness as the car came, running smoothly, towards them.

"And now, you yellow-eyed devil!——" said Mr. Bunn. "And now—we'll see! . . . Major Aldebaran Weir Fan Tzu Kang of the South Chinese Army, as you told us!"

He laughed tautly, but his laughter was wholly lacking in mirth.

The lights of the car were devouring the moon-grey darkness and she was upon the ambush, it seemed, almost instantly.

And so well had the old adventurer judged his distances that when Yellow Eyes jammed on his brakes and brought up the car with a jerk, as the red lights round the bend shot up before him, he stopped dead opposite Mr. Bunn.

"What the devil does this mean?" he said aloud, startled, glaring at the lanterned barrier.

"Your finish——" jarred a harsh voice at his ear, and the metal lips of a heavy automatic pistol drove against his cheekbone with a force that cut to the bone.

"Steady, steady, damn you, Weir. I shoot if you move a muscle," grated a voice of doom. Another armed shadow swung down on the car from the front—Fortworth.

It was instantaneous.

Somebody cursed in the interior of the hooded car—a door was flung back—and a man leaped out. But it was into the arms of Sing Song that he leaped. They went down, rolling in the road, fighting savagely.

The yellow-eyed man, sitting desperately still, made his last effort. His feet were invisible to Mr. Bunn, and he must have tried to let in his clutch and roar up his engine to take the sudden weight of the car on the top speed, in which the gear was still engaged. But he misjudged. The accelerator of the sensitive engine responded more quickly than the clutch pedal, and Mr. Bunn, who was expecting something like this, caught the changed engine note just in time.

He drew back his heavy pistol and shot it forward again with an arm action like the head of a striking snake. The weapon crashed with savage force against

the temple of Yellow Eyes, and even as the car jerked forward violently, the engine stopping at once under the impossible strain, the Cobra-man fell stunned across the seat.

Fortworth, at the other side of the car, took him, dragging him out to where he could be more easily handled.

Sing Song had already mastered his man. Mr. Bunn turned to the interior of the car, flashing on his torch.

Patricia Vandermonde was there, pale, unconscious, her eyes closed. Well wrapped in rugs, partly supported by cushions, she lay leaning back in a corner.

A low, anxious voice brought Mr. Bunn's head round.

"Is she there?"

It was Larry Warrener, panting, swaying where he stood, as pale as the girl.

"Couldn't wait for the finish—just had to come—is—is——"

"Yes, yes, yes! It's all right—all right. But, man alive, you're all in yourself!"

Mr. Bunn was right. Warrener was reeling where he stood. He had been running.

"Here, son, this won't do! Get in with her and I'll run you both along to the doctor's right away!"

Mr. Bunn helped him into the car.

"I'll leave Miss Vandermonde in your care for the next five minutes," he said. "Take care of her—now you've got her. And . . . don't lose her again!"

He started the engine.

"Keep those two snakes scotched," he warned the others. "Yellow Eyes particularly—I'll be back in ten minutes!" He swung the car through the flimsy

barrier and headed to the village—where he promptly handed over Patricia Vandermonde and Warrener to the doctor who, for once, had completely forgotten his glassy-eyed birds and beasts.

Within a quarter of an hour, Mr. Bunn was back at the place of the lanterned barrier. All was well there.

Between them, Sing Song and Fortworth had made quite sure of the Cobra-man (with cord) and of the other, who proved to be the thin, dark man, who had accompanied the impersonator, Lora Dubars, on that night visit to Harchester Hall.

Mr. Bunn left them in charge of Sing Song.

Then he glanced at his watch.

"Five minutes overdue already," he muttered. "MacHarrall will be getting nervy. Watch these two, Sing, with both eyes all the time—if you let them get away from you, remember that you are practically sentencing me to ten years—for manslaughter. You will be the man slaughtered, son!" he warned, and turned to his partner. "Look alive, Squire."

Fortworth got in, and Mr. Bunn drove on towards the lonely house.

"To my mind, this is the trickiest part of the whole scheme," he said. "It's absolutely necessary that Scanlon thinks we are Yellow Eyes returning for some reason or other. Ready, Squire?"

"Sure," growled Fortworth, peering ahead.

"Right—here we are."

Amid a clamour of dogs, he ran swiftly level with the gate. Fortworth, who had slipped on the hat and muffler of the actor-like prisoner, dropped out of the car before it had stopped, ran round, raised the bonnet,

and was bending over the engine as Scanlon, alarmed by the dogs, hurried alone down the path between the door and the gate.

"Why, Major, what's gone wrong?" he cried out anxiously, as he stepped through the gateway. He had recognised the outlines of the car—but he did not realise that the driver had changed. He was quick to do so—but not quick enough. Even as he uttered a startled exclamation, recoiling and snatching for his pocket, a smashing, backhanded blow from a spanner in the left hand of Fortworth, stooping over the engine, knocked him senseless. He dropped, gurgling queerly.

The space about the car seemed suddenly to fill with men—MacHarrall, Jeff Croucher, Yarrow and, a moment later, Cassidy, emerging from their ambushes about the house. They hurried in up the path to the open door of the house, posting themselves on each side of the oblong of bright light from the hall.

Mr. Bunn touched a button and the electric horn brayed urgently. Fortworth had dragged Scanlon out of view behind the car.

Another man came hurriedly out from the door, calling anxiously to know what was the matter. But before he had taken two strides from the door, he was tripped and down, with Yarrow and Cassidy at his wrists.

"And that should leave only the ladies!" said Mr. Bunn. "We seem to have pulled it off. Come on, Mac!"

They entered the house together, coming face to face in the hall with two women, who, obviously, were following the last man.

They stopped, gaping with amazement. One was the striking brunette who, staying with Miss Vandermonde as a friend, but secretly in league with Scanlon, had betrayed the heiress on the golf-links, and hastened back to Harchester Hall with the impersonator; the other was the woman Dubars, the impersonator herself.

Their moment of sheer shock at sight of the grim-faced, unexpected visitors, ruined any chance they may have had of escape.

"Ah, ladies—just a moment!" MacHarrall moved swiftly round them on one side, Mr. Bunn on the other, leaving them to confront Yarrow entering by the door with Cassidy, who had handcuffed the last prisoner to the iron post of the gate, on his heels.

"You are arrested, Lora Dubars and Anita Welland!" said MacHarrall. Yarrow's hands flew out—there was a swift, panic-stricken flurry of arms—something clicked—and the women were handcuffed together, a detective holding each of their free wrists.

MacHarrall glanced at Mr. Bunn.

"Don't usually handcuff the women," he said, "but—these two are dangerous."

Certainly they looked it. But only for an instant. If they were dangerous they were also—in their way—clever. Much too clever to say one word, or give one sign, that could ever be turned against them. Quick-witted as she-wolves, they realised that they were badly in the toils, and must lose not one single chance likely to be turned to their advantage.

"I think you will come to regret this stupid blunder very bitterly. I don't understand at all. But I assume

that I shall be permitted, in due course, to communicate with my lawyers," said Miss Dubars, her eyes dark.

"Oh, sure," returned MacHarrall readily.

Miss Welland caused her great eyes to flash.

"And I shall not rest satisfied with the apologies for this stupid and obvious mistake, which, before long, you will be anxious to make," she said disdainfully.

"That will be all right," replied MacHarrall good-humouredly, and turned to Mr. Bunn.

"Marvellous how they will brazen it out," he said, "on the off-chance."

MacHarrall put Yarrow in charge of the women, sent Cassidy to run through the house, and, with Mr. Bunn, went out to collect the other prisoners.

"Those dames are caught, but they'll take some holding. They'll deny everything—injured innocence—did what they were ordered to do by their men. That sort of stuff. They'll get away with something light in the long run—though I'll do my best to get them twenty years apiece; yes, sir. This was a murder plot, remember, and they were in it up to their eyes."

"Hum! Well, I'll run back and bring in Yellow Eyes and the other. My Chink—remarkable lad, that—is guarding 'em down the track," said Mr. Bunn tranquilly.

MacHarrall looked at him with a certain admiration.

"Well, it's been a neat haul—the neatest I've ever heard of," he said. "If I am any judge, the safety catches of something like a dozen automatics have been slid clear for action to-night—and not a shot fired! Say, you ought to have been a general in the Great War."

Mr. Bunn nodded, well pleased.

"Yes," he said frankly, "I ought. But, somehow—like a lot of others—I was overlooked. Never could understand how, quite. However—so it goes, so it goes."

He laughed and, with his partner, swung once more down the track.

Sing Song had made no mistakes. Silent, and evil-eyed, the man Weir was brought to the house, with Scanlon's accomplice, and locked away under guard of two detectives for the night.

Then Mr. Bunn went to the doctor's house to see about Miss Vandermonde and Larry Warrenner.

The old doctor was standing in the hall, smiling admiringly at a pigeon-chested bullfinch in a glass case.

"All right?" asked Mr. Bunn.

The doctor jerked his head towards the closed door.

"Amazing!" he said. "I've never known a lady come out from an anæsthetic more wonderfully. She shivered a little in the young man's arms, gazed up, and said: 'Oh, Larry!'—and as they seemed to have no further need for my services, I stepped out. What do you think of my bullfinch, my dear sir?"

Mr. Bunn studied the bird.

"They've got nothing in South Kensington Museum like it—nothing like it!" he declared firmly, if ambiguously. "I never saw such a bit of work in my life."

The doctor blushed.

"It's not bad, I agree. I——"

But Mr. Bunn broke in.

“ I’ll have to be moving along now. Miss Vandermonde and Mr. Warrener will be all right in your care for the rest of the night, I know,” he said. “ Another time for the bullfinch, hey?—fine bit of work. Some other time I’d be glad to have the history of that bit of work. Good-night ! ”

And so, well pleased, he set out on his last journey back to the lonely house.

CHAPTER XXII

THERE was no further difficulty—though the two Chinks from the Forest House escaped. They must have left the place with Weir and headed for some secret rendezvous at which he intended to join them, with his victim, later.

From none of the winning side did Mr. Bunn receive anything but compliments at the way he had wound up things—except possibly from his partner who suggested vaguely that the proceedings were slightly “tame.” Although a week had passed since the night of the triumph, Fortworth still seemed aggrieved at losing his anticipated “settlement” with the man with the Yellow Eyes.

Mr. Bunn promptly corrected his ideas.

“Tame! *Tame!*” he roared. “You call a bit of strategy and tactics like that *tame*. Why, man alive, it was a lightning stroke of genius—by me. Not a shot fired, not a blow struck—on *us*, anyway! And we picked that bunch of bad crooks like picking a bunch of good grapes! What man could have done it better? Napoleon Bonaparte, perhaps—I’ll not deny that, but I doubt it. I tell you, squire, there are times when I nearly mesmerise myself admiring it. Tame, hey? Ask MacHarrall—and he’ll tell you that I’m a boss tactician—that if I cared to drop in at Scotland Yard

any time, there's an important position waiting for me—when they know who I am——”

“Yes, no doubt. And there's one waiting at Dartmoor for you too—if you get a swelled head,” continued Fortworth.

Mr. Bunn suddenly looked solemn.

“Humph!” he said, a little nonplussed at this unexpected candour. “Morbid mind, you've got.”

Fortworth looked oddly at his partner.

“Well, I guess I've got a right to be morbid,” he said. “For apart from the small cloud of glory—and a very small cloud it was—we've got out of it all, what have we made? That's it. *How* much? Money I'm speaking of. What money have we made out of it? Nothing—none—*nil*! Kicks, yes—kicks galore—and thanks—bushels of 'em. But any money? I'll say not. Look at it—at the facts. We're out of pocket over the affair.”

He stared, speaking aggrievedly.

“The thing has been wound up badly, not a doubt of it,” he declared. “Look at it—look at the way you were so modest when we interviewed Whitney Vandermonde. You gave practically all the credit to Larry Warrenner and MacHarrall—why?”

Mr. Bunn nodded.

“I'll tell you, Squire,” he said, with a certain extremely deceptive air of humility. “I like Mac—a good fellow, in trouble with a large consignment of real bad luck. If I'd given that augur-eyed, sharp-witted old millionaire the truth, MacHarrall and his men would have been fired forthwith. Lord, man, we're too comfortable ourselves to want to see three

good lads fired out of good positions, for sake of a little glory. . . . I steered a lot of credit towards Larry and Jeff, because I wanted to get Larry well fixed with Whitney Vandermonde. The old man has always objected to him on the ground of poverty—Larry hasn't got a lot of money, and Whitney wanted his niece to marry what he considers a rich man. So I wanted to put Larry in right with the old man—and did so."

"At our own expense," grumbled Fortworth.

"Well, well, maybe so," responded his partner. "There was another reason. My brother Tony and Fanchon, my pretty little sister-in-law, were watching me pretty sharply. I like them a lot, and they like me—but they know that I am a man who does not go into violent action for nothing. And they were—and still are—wondering just why I interfered, and what I got out of it all. They know me—but I've got 'em guessing."

"Huh, they needn't guess themselves weary—*nothing* was what you got."

"If Patricia Vandermonde had not been so shaken and ill that her old uncle insisted on taking her and Larry right away to the Riviera for change of scene at once, with all his retinue, except one or two of the detectives, you would have witnessed a very pretty scene of gratitude and thanks from her to us, Squire. But it was not to be. That's the way to sum it up: It was not to be. Whitney Vandermonde is a very razor-edged old gentleman—and he didn't quite cotton to us. Perhaps he was right, perhaps wrong. He thanked us politely—but he let it go at that. And

—as between three gentlemen—what more could we do than—let it go?”

Mr. Bunn, puffing at a very fine cigar, gazed at his partner with a lurking smile.

“After all, why grouch?” he asked. “The thing was a success—the girl was saved. The crooks were caught, and can be convicted without our being dragged into the affair as witnesses. I don’t want to appear in court against them—neither do you. The less we have to do with courts the better. In fact, when the case comes on—if the application for extradition fails—I want us to be cruising somewhere down in the Mediterranean, free of any possible entanglements.”

Fortworth shrugged.

“All right. Let it go at that,” he said sulkily. “You may be right, but I think you’re wrong. I’ve got a feeling that we ought to have made money out of the affair. I can’t help my feelings, can I? Still, I’ll say no more. We’ve been bodily battered and we’ve lost money.”

Mr. Bunn rose and went at once to the safe.

“Not actually *lost* money,” he said, chuckling, and produced the dispatch-case he and Sing had sleighted from Scanlon’s car.

He put it on the table and carefully raised the lid. It was full of packets of bank-notes.

“There’s five thousand there,” he said. “Scanlon’s first modest hack at the Vandermonde treasury.”

Fortworth stiffened suddenly, staring at Mr. Bunn.

“Hey, what’s that?” he exclaimed excitedly.

“Five thousand pounds—for expenses. Scanlon

stole them . . . and then lost them. They're ours, now."

Mr. Bunn, feigning not to notice the glare of happy amazement on his partner's face, locked the door, and strolled back to the safe.

"You are a very unbelieving sort of man, Squire," he said over his shoulder. "Very. Didn't I tell you to leave the money end of the thing to the old man? Am I the sort of Don Quixshot to gallop into the battle gratis and for nothing? You ought to know me better! Take a glance at these!"

He up-ended a small sack of stout cotton—and there poured down on to the table between them a gleaming cascade of jewels: a rainbow of diamonds, slashed with the green flare of emeralds, the hot pinkish-red fire of flawless rubies, and the milky sheen of pearls. Jewels of every kind, every variety, but of only one quality—the finest.

Fortworth gasped.

"What's this?"

Mr. Bunn smiled benevolently.

"This? Oh, this is just our rake-off," he purred. "The old man's little surprise for his ham-headed, mule-witted partner!"

He laughed.

"Lord, man, did you think I'd overlooked the fact that we've got to get a living! . . . I may be a bit sentimental about some things—and I admit it freely—but not about my daily bread. No, sir—not about——"

"But where did you get 'em?" asked Fortworth.

"From the room where we found the impersonator of Miss Vandermonde. I watched her eyes when we

stampeded her. They darted to the place where Patricia's jewel-case was kept. I found it while you were hurrying her to the secret passage! I had 'em in my pocket—bulging, you may say—when Weir and his men spread-eagled us in the cellar."

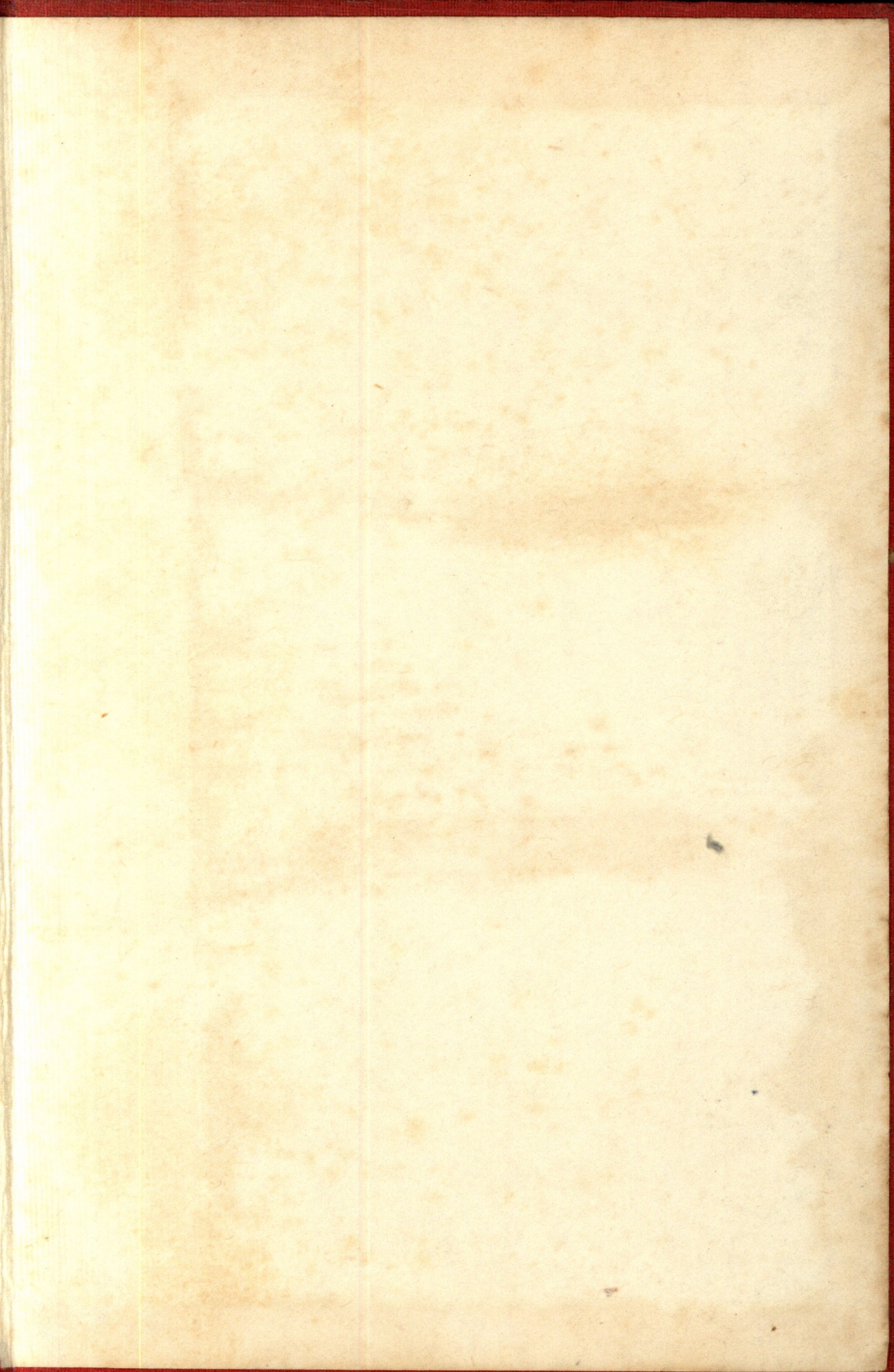
"They are Patricia Vandermonde's!"

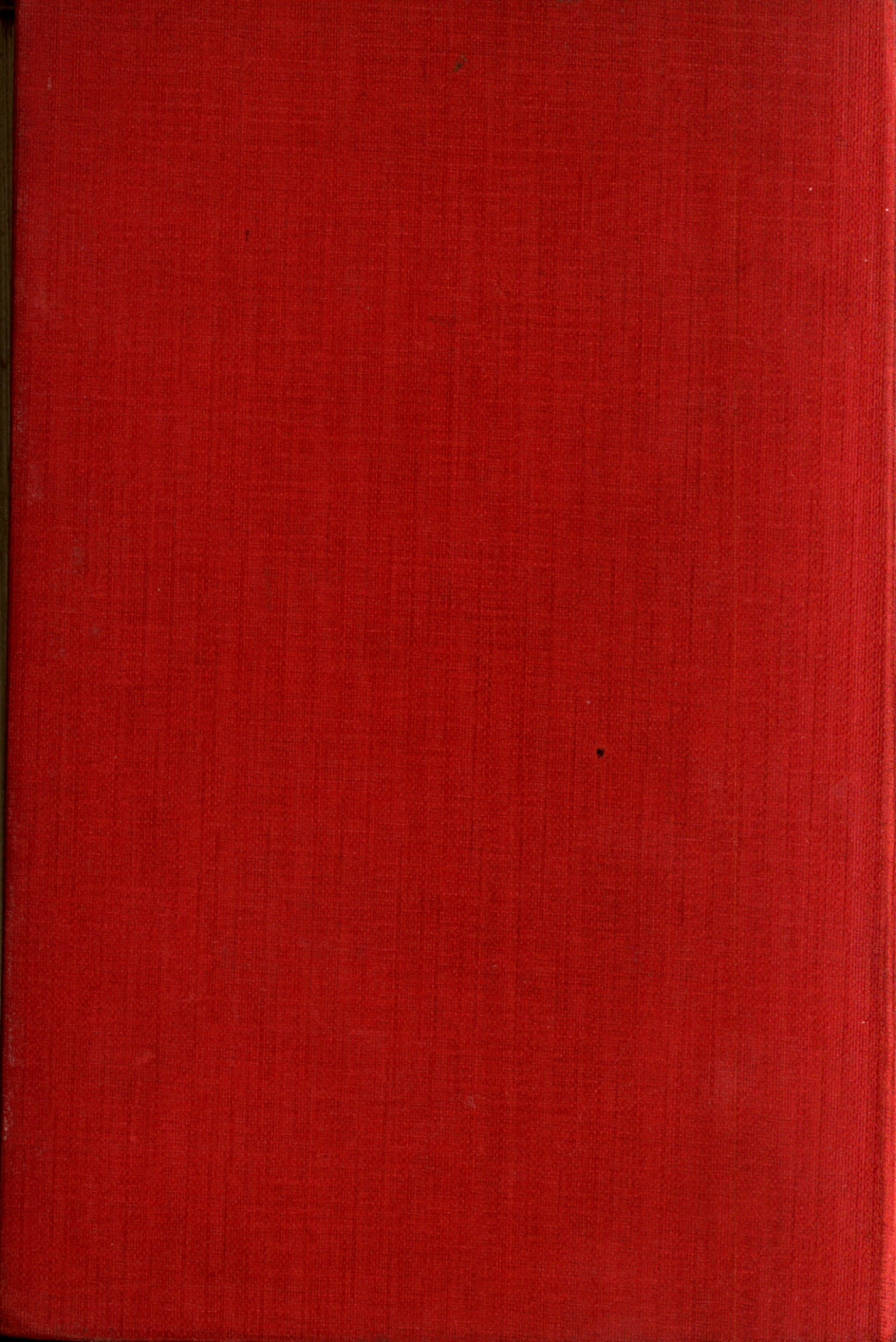
"Sure, they *were*," responded Mr. Bunn cheerfully. "And if Uncle Whitney had come across like a little man with a decent bit of money for what we did for him, they would be hers now. But he didn't. He's got a mean streak, has Whitney, except where Patricia is concerned—and I knew that years ago. It was a detail—but I bore it in mind—being a master of detail, as you know. This little detail"—he beamed on the glittering pile—"is as good to us as thirty thousand pounds. And it ain't worth troubling a multi-millionaire (with his pet niece restored to him) about. Thirty thousand from fifty million dollars! . . . What do you think it amounts to, Squire? I worked it out. About three weeks' income!"

Mr. Bunn moved to the side-board, chuckling.

"No, Squire—it won't strain old Whitney Vandermonde to any marked extent to buy Patricia a better lot of jewels than these, believe me . . . Put 'em back in the bag when you've finished admiring them—and then you can start admiring me!"

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THE
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WITH
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EYES

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